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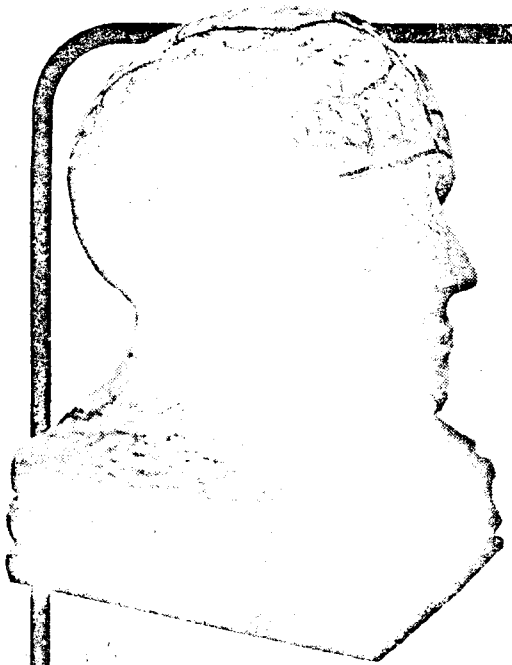

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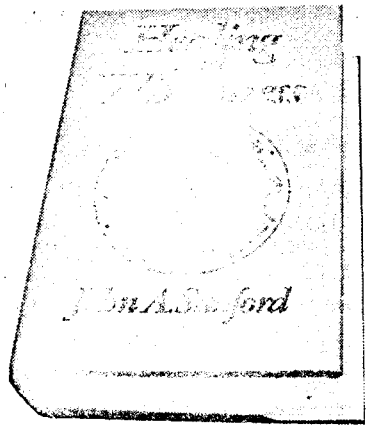

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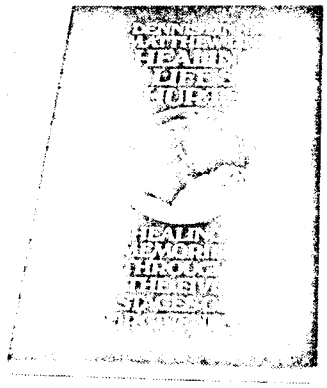

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This is a combined June 9 and June 23 Issue.

ON THE FRONTIERS OF THEOLOGY

Theology—once known in a time of greater metaphysical homogeneity as the "queen of the sciences"—has not always been popularly understood in terms of its "frontiers," unless the frontier has been a barrier, the boundary line with the guard post keeping the aliens out and the citizens in.

Yet, in the American imagination, the frontier has always been part challenge, part temptation—whether the Great Plains, the exploding cities, the moon, the depths of the personal unconscious or outer space, it is a shifting threshold of the unknown beyond which beckon wealth, mystery, risk and death.

As the image of the frontier has been central to America's self-understanding, so it should be central to the American theologian's self-understanding as well. A contemporary tour along the frontiers of theology—the quasi-scientific study of man's relationship with God—particularly since Vatican II described the church as a people on pilgrimage, is bound to raise almost as many questions as it answers. The God with whom we seek to relate may remain as elusive—yet dazzling—as the rainbow beyond the mountain range or as threatening as the storm at sea which frightens one man into belief and another into despair. Any frontiersman, literal or intellectual, knows well the fragility of his own courage; but he also knows that if he does not cross the imaginary boundary line he will wither up and die.

With this in mind we asked nine American theologians to lead us to the frontiers of their knowledge and to confront a series of specific questions that are likely to remain unresolved for some time: on our understanding of Jesus and God; on the relevance of the sacraments and the religious life; on the proper use of our human creative powers.

Here, briefly, are some of the issues they discuss. We begin with theology and autobiography not because this subject may have become, like the "Death of God" in the 1960s, the 1970s fad of the "me generation," but because it helps return us to one of theology's fundamental activities—a reflective analysis of human experience. This leads us inevitably to the stories Jesus told to reveal his own identity, and to an encounter with the "shock waves undulating from a thorough revision of our perception of Jesus" and with the persistent Gospel question of his identity, "Who do you say that I am?"

In a philosophical climate that sees God as process and in a political climate that recognizes the power of the critique of religion mounted by Marx and his more thoughtful descendants, we must ask how the word "God" might be understood if we are to confront the problem of evil in a more convincing way. We ask whether feminism and other liberation theologies help us in our search for a new God-talk and whether, in an effort to bring God into our struggle for justice in the world, we might disprove the accusation that the God who represents our liberation is not a power in our history.

Meanwhile we struggle to find God in worship and in the sacraments and, by digging for our contemplative roots, to see if our religious orders can take greater risks to lead us through the inescapable stages of spiritual death and rebirth.

Finally we grapple with the idea of the church as teacher, an institution trying to protect permanent values while it faces up to change—particularly in the areas which will forever remain the most complex and most personal: the use of our sexuality; our mastery of the universe through technology and the life sciences; and our poetic powers—in literature, art and film—to once again glimpse God.

American theology is no more dead than God, and the intellectual adventure of the American church has just begun.

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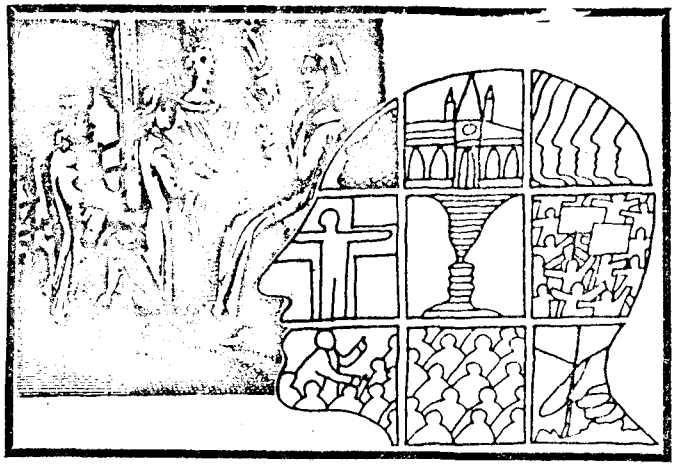

Relating theology to lived experience

THEOLOGY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

JOHN SHEA

A cynical appraisal of linking theology with autobiography would be: here we go again. After brief but intense affairs with secularity, play and revolution, theology has found a new partner. This time the choice has been shrewd. It is not a fad or the burning concern of a burning few but an in-season, out-of-season bandwagon, the always-relevant, ever-fascinating *me*.

A more moderate and more accurate appraisal would be: linking theology and autobiography is the latest and most promising form of the general enterprise of relating theology to lived experience. Rationalism, ideas without discernible existential import, still plagues theology. The practical and unavoidable question of all theological activity is: "Does it make a difference? If so, how?" Despite a clear understanding of this problem and a firm resolve to do something about it, the gap between Christian existence and Christian theology remains. Wolfgang Beinert situates the problem historically.

> Theology, once unified, divided into disciplines, and exegesis and dogmatics separated. Moral theology soon separated from dogmatics, asceticism and mysticism were assigned minor roles in priestly training. Great theologians were no longer saints and saints were no longer great theologians; sainthood was no longer a category in dogmatics. Theology degenerated into a mere school subject and Christian piety became a wilderness of indigestible fancies. Hence moderns think of Christianity as a shallow and unbeneficial pursuit . . . ("Theology and Christian Existence," *Theology Digest*, Summer, 1977, pp. 105-106.)

Contemporary theological activity is keenly aware that it is easier to run from rationalism than it is to actually arrive at life.

The drive to make theological reflection an integral component of the life process is more than a bid for popularity. It stems from faith's concern with the que tion of salvation. Faith's ambition and its natural hor is to be where everything is at stake, where life han in the balance, where serious loss and gain are the ou come. Today the locale of salvation is not relegated death and after-life possibilities. All of life is unde stood as an ongoing redemptive process. As such, fai seeks to be present and formative to the decisions th influence personal and social life. The person of faith convinced that it makes all the difference. Theology the effort to explain and explore this critical differenc It seeks to understand how faith and the symbols of fai enter into the transformation of human life.

The phrase "theology and autobiography" in t title of this article is not a strict designation. It do not mean a concentration on autobiography as oppos to biography, history, or myth. Rather it points to series of ideas, side-by-side insights that cluster arou the relationship between religious self-understanding ar story forms. At any given moment we may be telli our own story or someone else's, the traditional stori of our community or of someone else's, a fiction blend or the closest we can come to hard fact, a mythi apologetic, actional, satiric, or parabolic story (to u Crossan's distinctions); but no matter what the form the story is, a similar process is at work. In the telli we ourselves are told.

The teller is present in his tale in at least two way Gertrude Stein has shrewdly observed:

> Everybody's life is full of stories: . . . They are very occupying, but they are not really interesting. What is interesting is the way everyone tells their stories. If you listen, really listen, you will hear people repeating themselves. You will hear their pleading nature or their attacking nature or their asserting nature.

More importantly, the content of the stories we choo to tell and retell betray the convictions, values and co ducts we prize and deplore. Storytelling seems to be human activity which excludes disinterestedness. In fa a recent approach to Christology attempts to study ho

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FATHER JOHN SHEA *is a Chicago priest, author and member of the faculty of St. Mary of the Lake Seminary. His most recent book is* Stories of God *(Thomas More).*

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the parables Jesus told reveal his identity. Since we are never far from our stories, our stories become a way of getting at us.

Not only the stories we tell but those we hear and read are often quickly translated into our own life situations. James Olney (*Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography*, Princeton University Press, 1972) thinks that autobiography is the form of literature which "most immediately and deeply engages our interest." The reason for this is that "it brings an increased awareness, through an understanding of another life in another time and place, of the nature of our own selves and our share in the human condition." At least one reason why certain stories interest us is that they come close to home and yet are an invitation to journey. In other words, a story engages us because it is both similar and dissimilar. "A story . . . must reach me on some level to which I can respond, but it must also 'stretch' me, pull me beyond where I now am." (Robert McAfee Brown, "My Story and 'The Story'" *Theology Today*, July, 1975.) This perspective of approaching stories from the way they reflect and influence our self-understanding is not meant to reduce the many dimensions present in a story to the single dimension of self-reference. It is simply the recognition of the intense involvement of the self in the stories it tells and hears and the attempt to explore the nature and scope of that involvement.

This widened focus on autobiography is one of many avenues into the recent, vast, and highly diverse literature on theology and story. Some of the theologians who have contributed to this discussion are: R. Richard Niebuhr, John Dunne, Harvey Cox, Michael Novak, Sam Keen, James Wm. McClendon, Jr., Gregory Baum, Wesley Kort, John Navone, Robert McAfee Brown, Louis Cameli, Johann Baptist Metz, James Cone, Dominic Crossan, Amos Wilder, James Barr, Sallie TeSelle, etc. (For an excellent survey from an academic viewpoint consult George W. Stroup, III "A Bibliographical Critique" *Theology Today*, July, 1975, pp. 133-143.) Some insights of the formation of the self through story are captured in key recurring themes, catch phrases which suggest the power and possibility of this approach.

1. The title of an article by Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience" (*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. XXXIX, 1971), establishes the anthropological foundations for the relationship between religious self-understanding and story. All experience is inescapably temporal. Each moment is a "tensed unity" of past, present, and future. Therefore the linguistic form most appropriate to this basic given of human existence is narrative. In fact, in order for life to be creatively negotiated a person must live out of a narrative infrastructure. Even philosophers, like Sartre, who proclaim a meaningless existence where each moment is alien to every other are secretly supported by a narrative pattern which enables them to courageously accept that existence. (Cf. John Haught, *Religion and Self-Acceptance*, Paulist Press, 1976, pp. 148-52.) Narrative is an inherent quality of experience and so a primal form of human discourse.

Dominic Crossan escalates the story form into a metaphysical principle. (*The Dark Interval*, Argus Press, 1976.) All is story. There is no reality which is independent of our constructive imagination. What we think is an objective description of what is "out there" is really a story, one possible way of imagining. Crossan emphasizes this point by contrasting the classical and modern mind-sets. The foundational story of the classical mind runs:

> Once upon a time there were people who lived on rafts upon the sea. The rafts were constructed of materials from the land whence they had come. On this land was a lighthouse in which there was a lighthouse keeper. No matter where the rafts were, and even if the people themselves had no idea where they actually were, the keeper always knew their whereabouts. There was even communication between people and keeper so that in an absolute emergency they could always be guided safely home to land.

The modern version reads: "There is no lighthouse keeper. There is no lighthouse. There is no dry land. There are only people living on rafts made from their imaginations. And there is the sea." Crossan's conclusion is that "the classical mind says, that's only a story, but the modern mind says, there's only story."

The perspectives of Crites and Crossan attempt to rescue story from second-class intellectual citizenry. Story is not merely that inferior form which antedated the clarity and precision of conceptual thinking. Story is the continual and fundamental way humans appropriate encountered reality. Also story does not fade when speculation soars. On the contrary it both points the direction and sets the limits of thought. In the past theological rescues have often led to theological crownings. The last becomes first with remarkable regularity. Whether the case for story is overstated or not, it is compelling enough to pursue. After all, it does seem that we are all under the sentence of Scheherazade. We tell our stories to live.

2. Sam Keen's remark that "telling stories is functionally equivalent to belief in God" suggests an inescapable religious dimension to storytelling. (*To A Dancing God*, Harper and Row, 1970.) The very act of storytelling is an implicit affirmation of ultimate meaning. Storytelling raises a person out of the "randomness" of the moment and inserts him into a larger framework. It points to what is holy and sacred which is now defined as "that irreducible principle, power, or presence which is the source and guarantor of unity,

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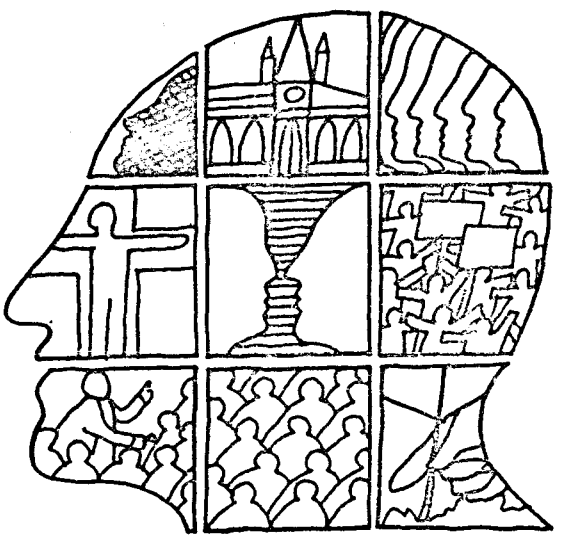
dignity, meaning, value and wholeness." Charles Winquist philosophically elaborates this insight by contrasting the act and content of storytelling. "What is absent in many modern stories is a *content* of positive affirmation. What is present even in relating a story of nothingness is a positive *act* of affirmation. . . . The escape from meaninglessness is achievable through the transcendence of act over content." ("The Act of Storytelling and the Self's Homecoming," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 42, 1974.) True existential atheism is not telling a godless story but having no story to tell.

Keen volunteers his own story as an example of this "subterranean theology." As a small boy Keen watched his father carve a monkey from a peach seed. The boy asked for the "creation" but his father said that this one was for his mother but later he would carve one for him. Years passed and both father and son forgot the promise. Then one day in a conversation with his father Keen suddenly found himself saying, "In all that is important you have never failed me. With one exception, you kept the promises you made to me—you never carved me that peach-seed monkey." Not long after that conversation Keen received a peach-seed monkey in the mail. Not long after that his father died. "He died only at the end of his life." For Keen this story creates a world of promises made and kept. ". . . a peach-seed monkey has become a symbol of all the promises which were made to me and the energy and care which nourished and created me as a human being. . . . I discover a task for my future; being the recipient of promises, I become the maker of promises." The holy has been affirmed, not on the basis of scriptural or ecclesiastical authority, but in the development of Keen's own life story.

Keen developed his perspective in explicit dialogue with the death of God movement. Part of his agenda was to find an alternate religious language to God-language. In an atmosphere more amenable to God-language his maxim might easily be reversed—to tell a story of God is functionally equivalent to believing in the human person. Stories of God are not tales of a supernatural person but the way birth-and-death-bound people relate to the Mystery they find themselves within. To tell a story of God is to proclaim a pervasive purpose in which humankind shares. The immediate criticism is that stories of God are thieves of the human. They take what is finest about us and project it skyward. But once the interpenetration of the human and the divine (not their separation) is the context of the stories, their real meaning surfaces. The Christian stories of God include the ultimate worth and salvific possibilities of the human world.

3. "God made man because he loves stories" is the conclusion to Elie Wiesel's often quoted story about stories. Whenever misfortune threatened the Jews, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov would retreat to the forest light the fire, say the prayer and the misfortune would be avoided. In the passing of time this task fell to a second Rabbi who knew both the place in the forest and the prayer but not how to light the fire. Nevertheless the misfortune was avoided. A third Rabbi knew only the place: the prayer and the fire had been forgotten. But this too was enough and the misfortune was avoided. Finally the task fell to Rabbi Israel of Rizhy who knew neither the place nor the fire nor the prayer. All he could do was tell the story. "And it was sufficient."

Storytelling is more than a delightful and engrossing activity. From a religious perspective it is a redemptive undertaking. Stories are one way we come into contact with the ubiquitous yet elusive presence of the sacred. This contact is probably the ultimate reason why we "believe in" a story. It has, in some way, grasped us



and mediated to us the power of the sacred. We find that in relating to reality through the story we are healed and renewed. This power of story to effect what it tells is captured in a delightful Hassidic tale passed on by Martin Buber.

> My grandfather was paralyzed. Once he was asked to tell a story about his teacher and he told how the holy Baal Shem Tov used to jump and dance when he was praying. My grandfather stood up while he was telling the story and the story carried him away so much that he had to jump and dance to show how the master had done it. From that moment, he was healed. This is how stories ought to be told.

4. One way of redemption through story is the interaction of personal experiences with the stories the community holds to be sacred. Elie Wiesel's own life traverses this path. His most recent work, *Messengers of God*, a reworking of the traditional Old Testament stories in the light of his own experience and a reappropri-

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tion of his own experience in the light of the traditional stories. His telling of the Isaac story is a case in point. Isaac, like Wiesel himself, is a survivor of a holocaust. God ordered his slaughter then relented. Yet the name Isaac means laughter. The story of Isaac is a tale of the affirmation of life in the face of the despair and nihilism of holocaust. As Wiesel tells the story, his own story is taken up and moved beyond madness and murder.

> Why was the most tragic of our ancestors named Isaac, a name which evokes and signifies laughter? Here is why. As the first survivor, he had to teach us, the future survivors of Jewish history, that it is possible to suffer and despair an entire lifetime and still not give up the art of laughter.
>
> Isaac, of course, never freed himself from the traumatizing scene that violated his youth; the holocaust had marked him and continued to haunt him forever. Yet he remained capable of laughter. And in spite of everything he did laugh.

As in any genuine dialogue both the communal and personal stories are transformed in the mutual process of listening and speaking.

A second example of the healing effects of relating personal and communal stories is John Haught's suggestion that the foundational Christian story can move us beyond self-deception. (To concretize this discussion consult Stanley Hauerwas and David Burrell, "Self-Deception and Autobiography: Theological and Ethical Reflection on *Speer's Inside the Third Reich*," *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Spring, 1974.) Self-deception is one of the most baffling of human phenomena. Our desire to know ourselves as we really are is suppressed. This restriction of the drive to know is often the result of guilt. "The flight from insight into self would not occur did I not already somehow know that my actual condition is painfully distant from an ideal toward which I aspire but which I also seek to evade." In this situation we create cover stories which carefully screen out all input that does not reenforce them. One way beyond this torturous and self-defeating circle is to situate ourselves in the story of God's unconditional acceptance of humankind. Within this foundational narrative framework of acceptance the need for cover stories dissolves and the dynamic urge to know is released. The sacred story of the community becomes the freeing context for individual biographies.

5. "The long narrative corpus of the Old Testament seems to me, as a body of literature, to merit the title of story rather than that of history." (James Barr, "Story and History in Biblical Theology" *The Journal of Religion*, January, 1976, p. 5.) Statements like this indicate a revolution in the academic understanding of the sacred writings of Christianity. In the recent past the dominant method of investigation was historical. Did it really happen was the popular and insistent question. But the recognition of Scripture as basically a story form suggests a new approach. The guiding question becomes: what picture of self, others, nature, history, and God does the story suggest? This is part of Paul Ricoeur's meaning: "The sense of a text is not *behind* the text [its historical origins] but in front of it [the world it opens up]." The suggestion is that scripture is most adequately prosecuted by neither history nor science but by the quality of the world it creates, the dangers that lurk within that world, and the possibilities that world holds out.

Dominic Crossan has outlined five relationships between story forms and our phenomenological world. These relationships are extremely helpful in understanding the story approach to religious self-understanding. "Myth establishes world. Apologue defends world. Action investigates world. Satire attacks world. Parable subverts world." Although all five story forms are found in scripture, myth and parable are particularly important.

A story functions mythically by structuring consciousness, encouraging attitudes, and suggesting behaviors. In the first moment the mythic story configures experience so that certain elements are highlighted. It calls attention to certain patterns present in the encountered reality and entices the person to relate to that reality through those patterns. In its second moment mythic stories embody and promote values. Donald Evans catches this aspect in the Christian creation myth.

> In the biblical context, if I say 'God is my Creator' I acknowledge my status as God's obedient servant and possession, I acknowledge God's gift of existence, and I acknowledge God's self-commitment to me. (*The Logic of Self-Involvement*, London: SCM Press, 1963, p. 158.)

Finally, myth provides a broad directionality for action but not a guide to the complexities of concrete situation. To move within the myth of the loving God suggests a lifestyle of care but it does not assure the ability to care or the knowledge of what the "caring thing" is in any situation. A story functions mythically when it establishes the world in which we live and move and have our being.

Two recent attempts which trace concrete activity to its mythic foundations are Michael Novak's *"Story" in Politics* (The Council on Religion and International Affairs, 1970) and Stanley Hauerwas and Richard Bondi's "Memory, Community and the Reasons for Living: Theological and Ethical Reflections on Suicide and Euthanasia" (*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, No. 44, Sept. 1976, pp. 439-452.) Both articles emphasize that behavior cannot be fully comprehended apart from its underlying mythic story. Novak's suggestion is that the U.S. should understand the basic story it is working out of before making foreign policy decisions. Hauerwas and Bondi argue that the

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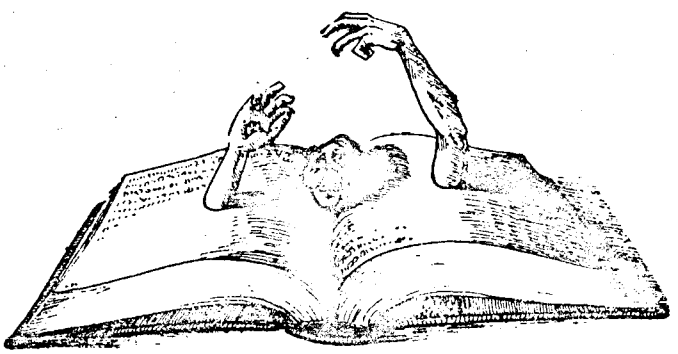
Christian story of life as a gift and our need to live in communities of trust create a world where euthanasia and suicide are alien choices. Mythically functioning stories are integral to self-understanding and activity.

Stories which function parabolically are not about the making of worlds but about the clash of worlds. Every attitude and behavior is grounded in a vision of reality. We work out of pre-conceptions, unexamined biases which both encourage and forbid. Parables take aim at these presuppositions and dominant directions. Their goal is subversion. They penetrate to the core of what we unquestionably hold and question it. For example, the parable of the Good Samaritan shatters the world of Jewish cultural expectation where every Samaritan is evil. In the shattering is the invitation to construct another world. (For an excellent survey of the history of parable research which focuses on the story



of the Good Samaritan, consult Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*, Fortress Press, 1976). In the Christian Scriptures stories function mythically to establish our powers and insights and parabolically to subvert our false consciousness and call us to "go beyond."

As with most new directions in theology each insight in the area of religious self-understanding and story forms raises multiple questions. If story is the linguistic form essential to temporal existence, how do we define it "clearly enough" to use it systematically? How is story related to concept? How should the various story forms be distinguished and discussed? How is a story verified or falsified? Telling a story may be an implicit affirmation of God but is it an adequate one? How does the reality of God explicitly influence our lives and how does God language explicitly enter our stories? Isak Dinesen may say, "All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them" but how exactly does this healing go on? If it is not magic, we must explore how story reconciles the past, envisions the future, and redeems the present. The relationship between narrative and history in the Bible needs to be extensively explored. Some observers think that in the next thirty years literary criticism will have the sam revolutionary impact that form redaction criticism ha had in the last thirty years. What shape does the her meneutical problem take when processed throug story categories? How does scripture, if it does, func tion mythically and parabolically today? Theology, be cause it dwells on transcendence, atrophies on answe and thrives on questions. Religious self-understandin through story forms is a live option.

Although "theology and autobiography" has immens potential for the classroom (cf. Elena Malits, "The ology as Biography" *Horizons*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 81 87), its natural environment is the grass roots com munity. Story is a perspective close enough to th street to be the way the "ordinary Christian" (nor professional theologians) reflects. In the parishes an neighborhoods life stories are unfolding in dialogu with each other and the larger Christian story. If th Christian peoples are to reflectively own their lives this process must be articulated and celebrated. In th present situation theology cannot be done in the uni versity and then passed on to the parish. Each com munity must relate its experiences to the Christian sym bols and so tell their story for their time and place.

The relationship between ministry and theology ha always been strained. Ministry appears concrete, actior oriented, practical. Theology appears speculative couched in technical jargon, in many ways a privat preserve. Yet from the perspective of story forms an religious self-understanding ministry and theology ar inseparably linked. The minister is the facilitator, cata lyst, and resource for the ongoing story telling proces (Cf. Louis Cameli, *Stories of Paradise: The Study o Spiritual Autobiographies and the Formation of Today Stories of Faith*, Paulist Press, 1978.) He/she initiate the type of question or perception which will lead to faith appropriation of their experiences. He/she help the people hear and clearly articulate the religiou theological, and ecclesiological dimensions of their si uation. He/she becomes a theological resource, relatin the contemporary situation to Christian perspectives an values. This is the concrete way of Christian story tel ing and a direction for pastoral theology.

The general area of "theology and autobiography" rich in insights and possibilities. It will undoubtec ly be developed in many directions. But perhaps i outstanding quality is one few associate with theolog It is interesting. Whitehead once remarked: "In th real world, it is more important that a proposition b interesting than that it be true. The importance o truth is that it adds to interest." The interest in wh we are and what we must be about as we move throug life and life moves through us is both a path to trut and the task that comes with breath. In Elie Wiesel language: "When he opened his eyes, Adam did no ask God: 'Who are you?' He asked: 'Who am I?' "

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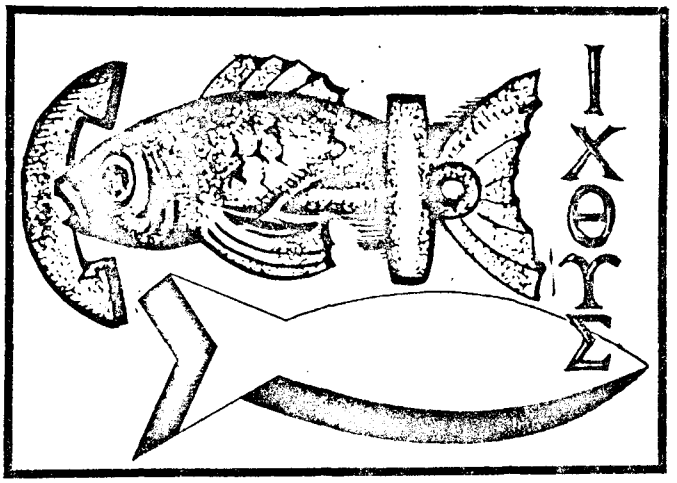

Christian faith demands reinterpretation

DISCERNING WHO JESUS IS

DONALD SENIOR

Crisis alerts have become almost routine in the contemporary church. But the fact that we are experiencing turmoil in Christology cannot be yawned away. What the church thinks of Jesus is the absolute center point of its existence. A case could be made that many of the tremors the church has experienced in the past decade are in fact the shock waves undulating from a thorough revision of our perception of Jesus. Liturgical reform, alteration in style of authority, shifting images of church and ministry—all of these events (or, at least, aspirations) are ultimately connected to the persistent Gospel question: "Who do you say that I am?"

It may be inaccurate to label the church's changing perception of Jesus as "crisis." A better term might be "vital sign." Whenever the Christian community begins to reflect on its image of Jesus and to test the integrity of its own life and institutions in the perspective of that image, then there is reason to believe the church is alive and maybe even well. But if the church's perception of Jesus were to remain too familiar, too routine, then there is every likelihood that the church's thought and action would grow moribund.

This process of reinterpretation is linked to the intrinsic nature of Christian faith. We affirm that Jesus was a human being, a Jewish male of the first century, who lived and died within the confines of Israel. But traditional Christian faith also affirms that Jesus is alive and present in history, that his person and message have perennial, universal and even cosmic significance, that he is, in fact, divine. This basic affirmation about Jesus Christ—that he is uniquely historical and yet universally significant—commits the church to a constant reassessment of what it thinks and says about Jesus as the community trudges across the boundaries of time and culture. Each generation must look back to what Christian testimony has understood Jesus to have been; and each generation must discern who Jesus is, not just for itself but for all the world. That is the cost, if you will, for what we believe.

This has been the pattern from the very beginning of the church's existence. The early Christians immediately began to draw out the universal implications of their faith in Jesus. In his brilliant essay, *Son of God* (Fortress Press, 1976), Martin Hengel challenges the scenario of only a gradual evolution in early Christology. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century History of Religions school of thought, represented by such men as F.C. Bauer, Adolph Harnack and Rudolph Bultmann, asserted that speculation on the cosmic significance of Jesus took place only as Christianity fell under the spell of (and, by implication, was compromised by) Greco-Roman philosophical and religious traditions. The memory of a lovely Jewish rabbi and charismatic social reformer was dogmatized beyond recognition. But the New Testament writings do not support this kind of evolutionary reconstruction. The hymn Paul incorporates into the second chapter of his letter to the Philippians (2:6-11) makes robust claims about the identity and mission of Jesus and climaxes in the declaration that he bears the divine name. Yet by almost every scholar's assessment, this hymn was composed less than two decades after the death of Jesus. Evidence of early and vigorous Christological speculation can be traced in many other New Testament traditions.

Thus Christology was not something the church fell into; it was something it began with. As soon as the disciples had experienced Jesus as risen from the dead and thereby claimed him as uniquely touched by the life of God, they set about the task of discerning the implications of Jesus's person and mission for the world in which they lived. Throughout its history the church, either through its own initiative or, more frequently, under the gun of cultural and historical changes, has had to re-think and re-articulate its most fundamental beliefs.

Convulsive cultural and sociological changes are

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forcing our generation of Christians to continue the process. Since 1974 there have been at least three major books on Christology by Roman Catholics (Hans Küng's *On Being a Christian,* Walter Kasper's *Jesus the Christ* and Edward Schillebeeckx's *Jesus,* which is now being translated into English), and the volume of periodical literature on Christological themes has swelled enormously. The goal of this article is not to catalogue the various methods and conclusions of this growing list of Christological studies, as helpful (and as formidable) as that might be. Perhaps equally helpful would be an attempt to isolate some of the major cultural and religious experiences that have sparked a revision in our Christology. To a great extent, these experiences have determined the kinds of frontiers now opening up before us.

Before beginning a rundown of some of these experiences, we should recall the classical notion of Christology that we claim to be under stress. What I want to describe is not the variety of ways theologians themselves have detailed our basic beliefs about the person and and nature of Jesus, but to outline the general view held by most Catholics. This view was built up not only by their faith experience as Christians but by the content and emphases of catechetics, preaching, and even church art. What we might label the "classical" view of Christ emphasized the incarnation. The Son of God took human flesh and became man. Christmas is not only the focal point of popular piety but reflects a "theological position." The very act of God becoming man was seen as *the* redemptive event; all other events of Jesus's life were subordinated to that central perspective. Thus the events of Jesus's life and ministry were a playing out of the God-man drama. His miracles prove his divine power. His predictions of death display his divine consciousness. His death is a preordained act of sacrifice whereby he atones for our sins. His resurrection, body and soul, is the final clinching proof of his divine nature. The Risen Jesus establishes his church and sends out his disciples to bring the whole world to redemption.

To cite this reflection on the life of Jesus as "under stress" is not meant to suggest that it is false or valueless. Behind it stands a Christology which has deep roots in the New Testament, is in accord with the great dogmatic formulations of Nicea and Chalcedon, and has sustained Christian life for countless believers. But this is not the only possible way of reflecting on the meaning of Jesus. And, in fact, some of its assumptions and some of its emphases are being called into question today. For example, this sort of Christology tends to emphasize the divinity of Jesus at the expense of his humanity. While incarnation, "enfleshment," is key, nevertheless the starting point is from God's side. The pre-existent Son of God descends and assumes a human nature. The great concern of such a Christology "from above" is the union of divine and human in Jesus. Thus a great deal of energy, not only in theology but in preaching and catechetics was spent on explaining the how (the hypostatic union of two natures in one person) and in defending the fact of Jesus's divinity. As a result classical Christology gave relatively little attention to the political cultural and psychological dynamics of Jesus's life. And in the western church Christology became increasingly dependent on a single philosophical tradition for the concepts and language it needed to articulate its belief about the person and nature of Jesus. And even though most Catholics had little or no philosophical training, such technical terms as "person," "hypostasis," "substance," and "nature" worked their way even into elementary catechisms. The richness of liturgical prayer and popular piety moved more deeply and widely into the meaning of Jesus, but the concerns and language of standard Christology became very fixed and limited.

The Breakdown of Metaphysics

Let us now turn to some of the experiences of our modern world which not only have brought crisis to this traditional Christology but have given us the chance to revitalize it.

One of the most important experiences of modern western culture has been the breakdown of metaphysics the ordered system of concept and language which enables us to reflect on the ultimate meaning of humanity and the world in which it lives. The devaluation of metaphysical questions and metaphysical language can be traced as far back as Descartes and Kant, or even further into the poverty of late scholasticism. One symptom of the crisis is a bewildering philosophical pluralism. Modern man has no common language, much less common conclusions, when we come to discuss ultimate realities. Pluralism is, of course, not necessarily an evil. In principle, a variety of ways of reflecting on reality should be enriching. But the problem of contemporary philosophical pluralism is compounded by a tendency to discount metaphysical questions. It is not simply a case of lacking the tools for metaphysics, but of not having the interest or the heart to take them up. Until very recently modern thought has turned its energies in a more subjective direction. The description of experience and the exploration of the psychological and social dimensions of the human person became more attractive. Functionalism and pragmatism gave more satisfaction than the classical philosophical question of being and truth.

Although Catholicism itself never really had an absolutely homogeneous metaphysical world view, it was for a time shielded from philosophical pluralism by the church's tenacious use of thomistic categories and

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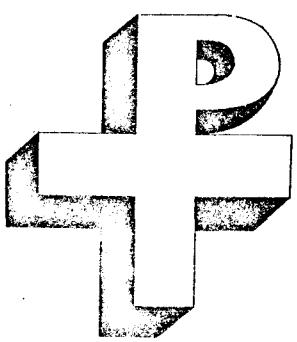
thomistic language in its theological discourse. By "thomistic" is meant not simply the theology of Aquinas but even more importantly the ongoing scholastic interpretation of thomistic-aristotelian views on the nature of man and history. The church's philosophical bulwark reached its strongest point in the late nineteenth century under Leo XIII.

But the church could not remain insulated from the contemporary philosophical crisis forever. In recent decades the philosophical Babel has been erected inside the church. No longer do seminaries form future preachers and teachers on the basis of the "unshakable teachings" of the Angelic Doctor. Technical philosophical terms which had a key role in classical Catholic Christology have become as baffling or indifferent to many Catholic thinkers as they have been for some time to the rest of the world.

In Catholic circles, too, the problem is not one of mere philosophical pluralism. Theology appeared



for a while to almost abandon its metaphysical quest. Some Christological studies in the sixties seemed content with a "functional" approach, limiting their concern to the relevance of what Jesus did, taught, or modeled rather than facing the question of his constitutive identity. The welcome revival of popular piety also played a part here. In some circles, religious experience is set over against theological speculation. And repetition of biblical language is considered more loyal than recasting tradition into abstract concepts.

But as Walter Kasper insists in *Jesus the Christ* (p. 20-21): "The universal claim of Christological belief can be represented appropriately only against the most extensive horizon conceivable. That brings Christology into encounter and confrontation with philosophy and, more exactly, with metaphysics. Christology inquires not just into this or that existent, but into existence in general. A Christian is so to speak compelled to become a metaphysician on account of his faith." Our Christian and Catholic tradition had managed to keep faith with this mandate, even from the beginning. Martin Hengel, in the essay we have already cited, rightly questions whether the Christological affirmations of the New Testament were merely functional rather than ontological. Judaism itself had nibbled on the ontological implications of the Torah, seeing it as the pattern for creation and all human existence. And even though the New Testament writers do not employ speculative philosophical language, the use of such titles as "Lord" and "Son of God," and reflection on Christ as Wisdom, as revealer, as preexistent and exalted, imply a probing of Jesus's identity and not simply a description of his function in salvation history. Classical Christology certainly pursued this ontological question. The problem was that it came to limit its metaphysical inquiry to a single area of Christology, the hypostatic union, and began to rely too exclusively on a philosophical tradition which lost touch with most of the modern world.

Thus the breakdown of metaphysics becomes one important signpost on the Christological frontier. It has thrown classical Christology into disarray by stripping it of its standardized language and framework. But, at the same time, the experience of metaphysical crisis reminds us that the scope of Christology demands nothing less than rigorous philosophical inquiry.

Secularization

Another basic experience of modern western culture —and therefore a factor to be reckoned with in charting the frontiers of Christology—is the impact of "secularization." This experience, too, can trace its roots to the breakdown of the medieval world view and to the social philosophies of such men as Comte and Marx. The first commandment of the secularist creed is that the human person has responsibility for his own destiny. And as the secrets of creation give way to the inevitable progress of human knowledge and scientific technology, the world can be understood and controlled without the need for the supernatural. Empiricism becomes the kiss of death for the mythical world view.

But the persistence of religion even in industrial societies and recent experience of the limits of technology have left many people wondering if the so-called secularist view of reality will not itself be quickly ushered into the mythical boneyard. Secularism is too western in its origin, too narrow in its viewpoint, too heady about the possibilities of human achievement, and too timid in its assessment of the richness of reality. As Gregory Baum suggests in *Religion and Alienation* (Paulist Press, 1975), the mad rush to embrace the secularist view of the world on the part of some modern theologians may well have been a poor reading of the evidence and too hasty an alliance with a passing cultural trend.

The secular view of the world may not be a final answer, but it has left a profound imprint on theology. It has, for example, helped pick our questions for us. Classical Christology presumed an unquestioned and

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comprehensive supernatural viewpoint. But the modern mind is much more conscious of how human initiative shapes our world. It is aware of the role of political and cultural dynamics even within religious experience. Therefore, if Jesus were truly human, then these dimensions of reality were at work in him. Thus secularization has turned our attention to the more secularly attractive and empirically defensible aspects of the gospel tradition, such as Jesus's parables, his social justice ministry, his human solidarity. Traditional Christology had little to say about the earthly ministry of Jesus, or of the inner connection between his life and death. The very fact of the Son of God becoming man was seen as adequately significant. Thus the emphasis on the incarnation tended paradoxically to relativise the cultural and political influences on Jesus's life, the very things the modern mind considers crucial for worldly existence. But today every major Christological study is forced to take Jesus's humanity much more seriously.

The secularist denial of the transcendent may have been premature, but it has effectively challenged Christology in another important area. It has forced modern theology to be more careful about its language. Classical Christology sometimes spoke of the "events" of Jesus's life such as his virginal conception, his miracles, his crucifixion and his ascension, as if they were all of the same order of reality. The reductionist challenge of the empirical world view has made modern theologians reflect on the function and truth value of religious myth in our biblical sources and in our credal formulations.

For some modern thinkers a secularist view of the world has thoroughly discredited—even made impossible—the basic tenets of traditional Christian assertions about Jesus. But for all Christians, the secularist atmosphere of our day has forced a needed revision of how we speak about Jesus and what things in his history kindle our interest.

The Biblical Renewal

One of the most astounding facts of church history in recent decades has been the relative ease with which the official Catholic church has accepted the methods and much of the results of modern biblical criticism. To use "ease" in this context is not to discount the agonies of many Catholic biblical scholars and theologians who were hounded, silenced and suspect because they espoused biblical criticism in the first half of this century. Nor do I mean to ignore the anxieties of many pastors, teachers and people who still consider biblical scholarship a veiled attack on Christian faith. But the fact remains that the Catholic Church has digested and even endorsed modern methods of biblical study to a degree that leaves many of my Protestant colleagues amazed and, at times, even enviou

But the biblical renewal taking place in Catholicis is resulting in changes more far-reaching than offici statements scholars can live with and the welcome sig of Catholics reading the scriptures. Perhaps only no the results of a close look at our biblical heritage a beginning to seep into the church's theological co sciousness, including its Christology.

First of all we have come to appreciate the fa that the New Testament contains not one way of r flecting on Jesus but many. In other words, the Ne Testament offers the basis for pluralism in Christolog The way the evangelist Luke describes the significanc of Jesus as the Spirit-filled Son of God is not the sam as John's portrayal of Jesus as Wisdom Reveale Hebrews' description of Jesus's role as exalted Lo through the metaphor of Temple liturgy says differe things about Christ than the Apocalypse's cosm combat imagery. In other words, the Christologies the New Testament are not mutually incompatibl but neither are they identical in language or scope. Th awareness of diversity within New Testament thoug has helped current theology break out of its myopi New Testament pluralism suggests that a "Christolo from above" is not the only way of being faithful our heritage. And the quest to legitimize pluralis prompted a closer look at Chalcedon's dogmatic stat ment on the person and nature of Jesus and t discovery that Chalcedon permits more latitude th classical Christology seemed to concede.

Another result of recent biblical scholarship w to document the role of the Christian community a its experience in the construction of the New Test ment image of Jesus. The New Testament writin were not gifts from above but the end products the early church's reflection on Jesus and his histor This reconstruction has substantial implications f ecclesiology, but it also effects Christology. Concretel it means that Bultmann and others had somethi when they suggested that there is a difference betwe the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. The Go pels cannot be taken as literal reportings of Jesu earthly history. The Gospels look at that histo through the lens of their post-Easter faith and e perience. The Evangelists' presentation of the actio of Jesus, his teaching, and the titles applied to hi have all been touched by this perspective.

A number of Christological frontiers loom up this aspect of the Gospels became clear. For examp the spotlight turns again to the humanity of Jesus. the "divine" element of Jesus in the Gospels repr sents a degree of theological interpretation (e.g., prophetic predictions of his death, certain aspects of t miracle tradition, etc.), then our prime sources not stand in the way of serious reflection on the h manity of Jesus. Modern Christology turns freely

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such questions as the consciousness of Jesus (e.g., Did he know he was divine? What did Jesus think about the future?), or the social and political influences on Jesus and his ministry (e.g., Was he a "revolutionary"? In what way did Judaism influence Jesus's perception of sexuality?). Questions seldom, if ever, treated in previous Christological speculation.

But there is a question more crucial than any of these. An awareness of the difference between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith—an awareness pressed on theology by a critical evaluation of the biblical evidence—lays bare the issue of what *is* the

connection between the earthly life of Jesus and the claims made about him in faith. In a strange way, liberal Protestantism and classical Catholicism took a common stance on this question. Classical Catholicism presumed there was no real difference between the New Testament affirmations about Christ and the literal history of Jesus. And some liberal proponents of the late 19th and early 20th century presumed there was no similarity. Thus neither camp struggled with the issue. But recent Christological studies, such as those of Schillebeeckx, Kasper, Küng and others, spend considerable time in charting how the generally acknowledged aspects of the history of Jesus, such as his piety, his sense of authority, and the peculiar thrust of his kingdom ministry form the implicit grounding points for later explicit Christological affirmations. Thus modern theology has been brought back to the starkest of Christian questions: what precisely is the connection between the person and history of that first century Jew and our belief in him as the Risen and present Lord?

Any attempt to answer that question responsibly must turn to the resurrection. And here too the church's plunge into the biblical renewal has had a profound impact. By focusing on the hypostatic union and therefore on the incarnation as its starting point, classical Christology in a sense did not "need" the resurrection. *The* saving event was the Son of God's entry into human history. Resurrection merely confirmed his divine nature and became a pledge of immortality to believers. The scant treatment given to the meaning of Jesus's resurrection in traditional manuals of theology is notorious. However, a careful look at the New Testament shows that the resurrection of Jesus was not an appendage to early Christology but its very starting point. The first Christians' experience of Jesus as risen from the dead impelled them to look back at the history of Jesus and see it in a new light. And it was the conviction of resurrection that gave fuel to their interpretation of the universe and its destiny. However resurrection is to be interpreted, the biblical evidence testifies that it was here that the history of Jesus and the church's faith in him as Lord first intersected.

But the church's serious attention to the bible has done more than move resurrection to the head of the Christological agenda. Through a deeper knowledge of semitic culture and Jewish religious tradition, we are now in a position to appreciate the *scope* of "resurrection." Resurrection as a general concept or expectation did not mean mere physical resuscitation nor even personal survival beyond death. In Judaism and early Christian thought, resurrection was fitted into the broader network of religious hopes about how God would ultimately vindicate Israel and creation itself. Resurrection was necessarily tied into eschatology, how one projected the final destiny of the community of Israel and the universe it peopled.

Thus the resurrection of Jesus has become the most telling litmus test for modern Christologies. Because resurrection speaks of the ultimate destiny not only of Jesus but of all humankind, it makes metaphysics a necessary part of any serious Christology. And because resurrection is inconceivable without the possibility of the transcendent, it directly challenges modern empiricism. It is not surprising that the very issue where some modern theology threatens to break faith with the tradition is right here. To speak of resurrection as a lingering memory of Jesus which liberated the energies of his frightened followers is not claiming what the early Christians claimed—no matter how subtly we attempt to recast their language. Nor is resurrection simply an elaborate metaphor for human aspirations. Modern Christology must attempt to say more than that. And "more" does not mean speaking only in biblical language or repeating New Testament credal formulas, as evangelical theology is content to do. To keep faith with the interpretive process which began with the New Testament and stretches through the conciliar period and down to our own day, theology must attempt to link up our contemporary understanding of the ultimate values and structures of our world with our repeated claims about the resurrection of Jesus as a pattern for human existence.

This is precisely the major concern of such modern Christologies proposed by W. Pannenberg, Karl Rahner, and now Walter Kasper. These men would be the last to say their efforts have tamed the frontier. In a thoughtful essay in *The Way* (April, 1977, Vol. 17),

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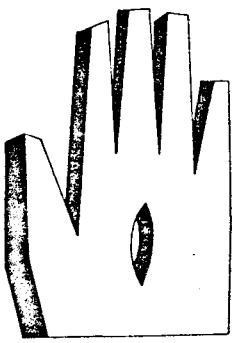
Gerald O'Collins concluded, after a survey of modern Christology, that our attempts to interpret the resurrection are too timid. The staggering richness of empirical data has prodded science itself to make imaginative leaps into new ways of defining matter and energy. The same creativity has not yet surfaced in theological reflection on bodiliness or time. And yet the scope of resurrection impels us to do so. It could well be that a renewed interest in mysticism and in the truth value of metaphorical and poetic language will eventually come to the rescue of western Christology. Some of the most awesome Christological statements of the New Testament are found in hymns and ecstatic utterances preserved in Paul's letters and other New Testament books. The bible is rooted in religious experience and has a trust in the power of metaphor and symbol to express truth. Many African and Asian cultures look indulgently at western assumptions that only abstract language and empirical criteria are adequate for probing reality. The development of a Catholic Christology that can really explore the implications of resurrection may well have to be more bold and more cross-cultural.

Jesus and the Borders of Our Faith

One of the innovations of Vatican II was a newfound respect for non-Christian religions. The document *Nostra Aetate* spoke warmly of the beauty of such religious traditions as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and gave special attention to Judaism. It urged Christians to enter into respectful dialogue with these religious groups. One of the unexpected results of this irenic attitude was that the bottom dropped out of the church's missionary enterprise. Missionary efforts and the number of mission personnel began a steep decline almost immediately and only now are beginning to level off.

Here again a profound Christological issue stood beneath what could appear on the surface as organizational fatigue or a lack of zeal. Missionaries were experiencing first hand what theologians only occasionally speculate about. Once the church, however cautiously, began to look at world religions as integral systems capable of leading to "a way of life that is imbued with a deep religious sense" (*Nostra Aetate*, #2), then many Christians instinctively recognized that the church's universal claims about Jesus were in jeopardy. Questions that were little discussed or never formulated bubbled to the surface: What do we mean by proclaiming Jesus as the source of revelation to a world in which significant numbers seem to find deep satisfaction in their own, non-Christian, religious traditions? In what way is Jesus's life, death and resurrection truly salvific for the millions of human beings who have never heard of him and for the millions who, for the foreseeable future, never will? Fr. Joseph Spae, who has written extensively on Christianity in Japan, is no asking Catholic theologians to think of the *theologic* issues posed by modern China. The fact that the po ulation of China, practically one-quarter of the popu lation of the world, has no real connection with Chri tianity and yet may be achieving some significa societal reforms should be a Christological problem f us and not just a question of pastoral strategy.

The same kind of crisis about the universal soteric logical claims of our Christology is felt by those engage



in the Jewish-Christian dialogue. In Vatican II's *Decl ration on Non-Christian Religions* and in the 197 *Guidelines on Religious Relations with the Jews*, t official church acknowledged a special relationship mu exist between Christianity and Judaism. But here agai the issue is deeper than religious civility or atoneme for Christian anti-semitism. The very existence Judaism triggers a Christological question: in what w does Jesus represent God's decisive act in the history world salvation if Judaism continues (as it does) to a viable religious entity? As Michael B. McGarry not in *Christology After Auschwitz* (Paulist Press, 1977 this question is being raised primarily in North Ameri where the Jewish-Christian dialogue is most active, b it is a question every Christian must ultimately as Even the first Christians could not escape it: Paul stru gles with the role of Israel in Romans 9 to 11, t very epistle in which he makes unequivocal claims abo salvation in Christ.

For these reasons some of the most radical questio about our understanding of Jesus are being asked n by university-based theologians but by missionaries the field, many of whom are strung out between a de commitment to their Christian faith and a profou respect for the religion and culture of non-Christi peoples. But the issue has not been totally neglect by modern theologians. Teilhard de Chardin attempt a cosmic Christology which saw Christ as the patte and goal of all historical and material developme Moltmann, Pannenberg, and Kasper all devote sig ficant portions of their Christologies (and not simp their writings on ecclesiology) to this question. But no of them deals concretely with non-Christian religio systems and in the rare cases where this is attempte

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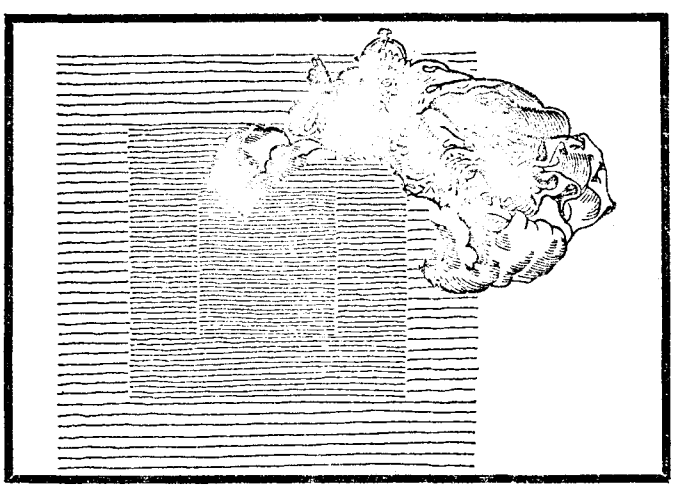
as in Hans Küng's *On Being a Christian*, it is done without full expertise and with decided western bias.

Thus the ecumenical thrust of modern church life has opened up another vast Christological frontier. From the beginning, the church has affirmed that God acted decisively in Jesus, not just for Christians but for the world. The resurrection of Jesus is the paradigm of all human destiny. Jesus's teaching about God and about the central values of authentic human existence are claimed as revelatory for all. One cannot be faithful to our tradition by suggesting that the New Testament writers meant something less or were simply prisoners of a sectarian viewpoint. Paul carries his vision of the Lordship of Jesus to the outreaches of his universe. The cosmic combat of Revelation is won by the Slain Lamb, the Risen Lord, again an attempt, however limited in language, that wants to go to the farthest borders of reality. In these and in many other symbols and metaphors the early Christians—and Christian theology since then—have tried to say it all about Jesus. The crisis we now face is how to affirm this cosmic dimension of Christ's lordship in the face of a viable religious pluralism.

Thus modern Christology is being forced to take into account more seriously than before the somewhat dormant side of our theology which had always claimed, but in muted volume, that the Spirit has been at work in histories and cultures other than those shaped by Judaeo-Christianity. That part of our tradition must be brought into direct connection with the way we speak of the universal role of Jesus. We can be more sympathetic towards the stammering of modern theologians on this question when we recall that a genuine global consciousness and a deliberate respect for religious pluralism are phenomena never before experienced in Christianity. And if the future brings contact with intelligent life on another planet, this great frontier of Christology will explode beyond recognition.

The responsibility to make Christology analytical and not merely descriptive, a deeper commitment to the humanity of Jesus, the challenge to be bolder and more comprehensive in understanding the resurrection, and the struggle to maintain the universal claims of Christology in the face of religious pluralism—these are some of the frontiers that loom up before a church seeking to be faithful in mind, as well as heart, to its Lord.



The problem of God in an evil world

GOD-TALK AFTER THE END OF CHRISTENDOM

ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER

In a famous essay Martin Buber tells of a noble atheist who challenged Buber's right to use the word God. Too many evil deeds have been done "in God's name" to allow this word to be other than blasphemy. Buber replies by acknowledging that indeed this is the most soiled and mutilated of all human words.

> Just for this reason I may not abandon it. Generations of men have laid the burden of their anxious lives upon this word and weighed it to the ground. It lies in the dust and bears their whole burden. The races of man with their religious factions have torn the word to pieces: they have killed for it and died for it. Where might I find a word like it to describe the Highest! If I took the purest, most sparkling concept from the inner treasure-chamber of the philosophers, I could only capture thereby an unbinding product of thought. I could not capture the Presence of the One whom the generations of men have honored and degraded with their awesome living and dying.

Buber concludes by saying that:

> We cannot cleanse the word God and we cannot make it whole, but defiled and mutilated as it is

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we can raise it from the ground and set it over an hour of great care. (*The Eclipse of God*, N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1952, p. 7-9.)

In this essay I wish to discuss particularly the kind of challenges which have come from those who are horrified by the historical evil done in God's name, but also from those who wish to rescue this word to set it anew over an hour of great care.

These contemporary challenges are not entirely new. Their roots go back at least to the early 19th century. They are rooted in that crisis of Western consciousness represented by the collapse of the *ancien régime* of Christendom and the discrediting of its institutions, culture and, finally, its idea of God. At the same time western humanity began to experience the world in a new way. The crumbling of the old order and its transcendent sanctions unleashed new forces within history itself. The old heaven collapsed only to reappear as a future heaven on earth. These experiences generated new ways of looking at nature, history and transcendence.

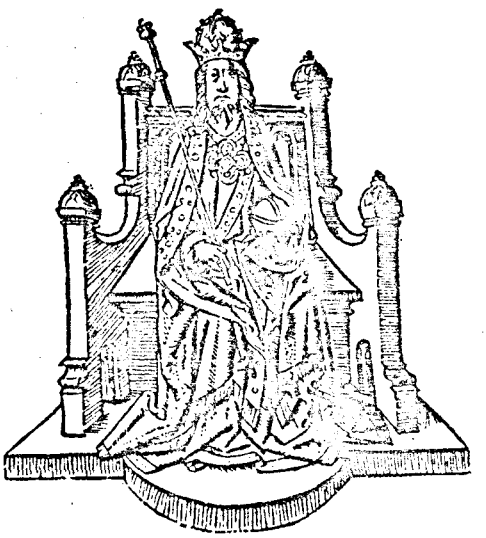
Classical Christian society had thought of nature as a static, finished, although finite world within which humanity "works out" its salvation in relation to a God and a transcendent destiny that is above this created framework. Christian theology inherited from Greek philosophy the idea of God as infinite, eternal, immutable Being. This Unmoved Mover is the beginning and end of all things, but remains in itself perfect and unchanged by these processes of creation and redemption.

The Enlightenment reflected a growing challenge to this view of nature in western consciousness. Nature was not a static, closed system in which humanity must endure its inherited social or even biological fate. Rather nature is an open-ended possibility of continual innovation. Nature is not yet finished, but open to continual perfecting. Humanity is the subject, not just the object, of this redemptive process. Christian eschatology was brought down to earth and made the transcendent vista of new historic possibilities.

This revolution in consciousness, which began among an intellectual elite, became visible in social processes through political and technological revolutions. Heaven, which heretofore had hovered as a transcendent Other far above the earth, had, so to speak, thrust itself into this mortal clay, transforming static being into dynamic process spinning forward toward unimaginable goals. This sense of nature as processive had its effect upon the idea of God, suggesting that God too is a dynamic, historical being. God is not just a perfect, immutable entity "squatting outside the world," but is the transcendent foundation of this dynamic process.

This means that God, too, comes into this process, is involved in it, not merely in the sense of being i engine driver, but in the sense also of being shape and developed through it. Being unfolds and this b coming of Being must ultimately be a developing the Being of God. The ancient Greek dichotomies Being and Becoming, which classical philosophy ha separated into two mutually exclusive spheres, have i terpenetrated and been mutually transformed into new unity of Being as Becoming through which Beir comes to be.

Hegel was the philosopher who painted this ne vision of God in history on a large canvas to intox cate the imagination of generations of thinkers. Fo Hegel the relationship between God and history wa dialectical, modeled on the subject-object dichotom of self-objectification and self-realization. God, th transcendent Subject, objectified Itself in history



order to bring Itself to self-realization through th dramas of history. History was the means throug which God manifests and makes conscious the fu potential of its creative being. God's Being was onl nascent or implicit at the beginning. Only through th processes of Becoming did God's Being reach its ful ness.

In more recent times Whitehead, Hartshorne an other process theologians have proposed similar de velopmental concepts of God. Whitehead particularl developed his metaphysics literally as a meta-physic as a philosophy that explicated the presuppositior of mathematical physics. As physics must now loo at nature as dynamic and evolutionary, so God mu be seen as the ultimate poles of the process throug which the universe moves continually from potentialit to actualization in concrete modes of existence, onl to pass into non-existence again. The achievements this process are "stored up," so to speak, in th evolving Being of God. God's being continually ex pands as the repository of the achievements of his

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torical existence. These process theories of God represent decisive challenges by the modern consciousness to the inherited model of the perfect and immutable God.

Theology as Anthropology

Another important critique of traditional God-language came from the left-wing Hegelians of the nineteenth century, specifically Ludwig Feuerbach. Feuerbach's thesis in the *Essence of Christianity* is simple to the point of being simplistic. Yet he posed an essential question which theology has been wrestling with ever since. This is the extent to which our ideas and doctrines about God are, in fact, human self-projection.

Classical theology was well aware that all our images of God are anthropological; that is, drawn from human experience. We have no other language with which to talk about God except heightened language about ourselves and our experiences. But classical theology has assumed that, through equating God with the superlatives of our ideals, and, at the same time, denying that God literally was "like" these human images, one could get to some idea of what God is apart from humanity. The classical critique of anthropological language safeguarded a God beyond and independent of these human images. Human images are both a reflecting glass and an impediment for viewing this transcendent being of God. Feuerbach, however, proposed a reduction of divine being to human being without residue.

For Feuerbach, all the doctrines about God can be seen as human self-projection and self-alienation. Humanity projects its inner substance, its ideals and hopes, upon God. God becomes the objectified image of all the human longings and struggles to define the better human self. The idea of God evolves as human self-consciousness evolves. God grows more universal and more moral, as humanity itself surpasses its earlier chauvinisms and gross sensibilities. Reforms in religion, or new religions combating old ones, represent this developing human consciousness. Older images of the divine grow too crude to encompass higher human self-concepts.

If God is an evolving self-projection of the human, God also is the way humans alienate themselves from their own higher capacities. The more humanity deposits its higher self in God, the more it denies these higher characteristics to itself. Humans fall down and worship their own alienated self-projection, humbly confessing that they are a "worm and no man." Humans see themselves as infinitely depraved and impoverished, completely dependent on divine grace and incapable of doing any good on their own. This alienating aspect of the divine projection prevents humanity from appropriating its own higher capacities and making them effective in human life.

For Feuerbach, therefore, the time has come for humanity to de-alienate the divine image. We must recognize God for what It is, namely, our own self-reflection. By reappropriating the wealth of our own powers, which we have built up over the centuries as the Divine Self, we bring all this work of human consciousness back to enrich the human self. Since God represents not just the individual but the collective depository of the higher human self-consciousness, the reappropriation of the divine self as the essence of the human self becomes a way of human self-realization, not just individually, but socially. By reappropriating its own communal image, humanity realizes itself as a communal being.

Feuerbach reverses the Hegelian dialectic of humanity and God. It is not the divine Self that alienates and objectifies itself in the created world in order to reappropriate its own potential, now made fully conscious. Rather it is the human self that alienates and objectifies itself in God. In appropriating this development, it brings to full realization its own self-reflection.

Christian theologians would stop short of Feuerbach's total reduction of theology to anthropology. They would assert that, even if we project our own idealized faces upon God, there is nevertheless a Something out there upon which our faces are mirrored. The unrealized potential of the human self represents a transcendency of being that is both more than what the human is now and yet is related to human beings as its own higher fulfillment. This unrealized self must have a higher "base" of being than existing humanity. Calling this higher self "God" does not deny that it is indeed the ongoing and yet ever unrealized destiny of the human self. But it does affirm that there must be an autonomous level of Being that explains this ongoing possibility and is the ground of actual and potential human existence.

Yet this safeguarding of the autonomous Being of God allows such theologians to admit that, concretely, our images about this transcendent self are always rooted in human self-statement. What we say about this higher Being represents particular moments of our own aspiring consciousness and must be reappropriated as our human potential in order to become, not merely contemplative statement, but moral, spiritual, *praxis*. Our statements about God must be analyzed to find out what they are saying about ourselves. This must be done, not only in order to appropriate our better self, but also in order to critique some of the worse aspects of ourselves which masquerade under the name of God. Certain models of God also become the way of sanctifying social and political systems. For example, in the writings of the fourth century Church Father, Eusebius, the relationship between monotheism and universal im-

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perial monarchy is explicit. For Eusebius, universal monotheism is the cosmic counterpart of universal monarchy in the political order. The first is the foundation of the second and the second is the social reflection of the first. One might ask how many of our other assertions about God contain mystified social agendas?

Ideological Critique of God Language

It was Karl Marx, building upon the Feuerbachian reversal of Hegel, who stated for the nineteenth century the critique of God-talk as mystified talk about the ruling class and its sanctifications of its own systems of domination. It is not enough to unpack the essence of the divine self as the projected human self and reappropriate that as an act of human consciousness. One must also explicate the social base for that self-alienation. For Marx, that social base was class division. Humanity, first of all alienates its own labor, its own creativity, by turning some into the laborers and others into the owners of the means of production and the recipients of the wealth of exploited labor. The image of God serves as the ultimate ideological capstone of this system of class division, providing the owners and rulers with a spiritualized image and sanction for their own sovereignty over the world and teaching the workers to accept their own subjugated status as the divine Will.

The critique of religion as the alienated projection of human ideals is only the beginning. It must become the critique of the socio-economic alienation of humanity. This must take the form, not just of coups of consciousness, but revolutionary actions which grapple with the alienated system in order to overturn it and create a new social order where class division does not exist. As Marx states this in his fourth thesis on Feuerbach:

> For the fact that the secular foundation detaches itself from itself and establishes itself in the clouds as an independent realm is only to be explained by the self-cleavage and self-contradictoriness of this secular basis. The latter must itself therefore first be understood in its contradiction and then revolutionized in practice by the removal of this contradiction. Thus for instance, once the earthly family is discovered to be the secret of the Holy Family, the former must then itself be criticized in theory and revolutionized in practice. (Theses on Feuerbach, in *Marx and Engels on Religion*. N.Y.: Schocken, 1964, p. 70.)

For Marx, the image of God is not merely our own better selves to be delightfully recognized and recovered. On the contrary, it is a depository of infamy whereby the ruling classes have made God into the sanction of their own glorified class rule. "God" has taught all the servant classes of history to stifle their own nascen cries of protest and to bow down to their fate as divin commandment. Marx wants to snatch God's face out o the heavens in order to unmask and smash its humai counterpart, the oppressor. Marx's terse language reveal the prophetic anger that lies behind his critique o religion:

> The social principles of Christianity justified slavery in Antiquity, glorified the serfdom of the Middle Ages and equally know, when necessary, how to defend the oppression of the proletariat, although they make a pitiful face over it.
>
> The social principles of Christianity transfer the necessity of a ruling and an oppressed class and all they have for the latter is the pious wish that the former will be charitable.
>
> The social principles of Christianity transfer the consistorial councillor's adjustment of all the infamies to heaven and thus justify the further existence of those infamies on earth. (From "The Communism of the *Rheinischer Beobachter*," ibid., pp. 83-4.)

A reading of 19th century papal documents, justifying class rule as the ordained order of creation, woul show us that Marx was not far wrong in this criticism

What Marx could not foresee was that this ideologi cal critique of religion could be appropriated by Chris tians and become an essential component of new type of theology. Today various forms of liberation theolog contain, as an essential element, an ideological critiqu of religion. Latin American liberation theology con fronts directly an expression of Christianity that ha traditionally sanctified the power of the landed classe founded by the Spanish conquest. Hispanic Catholi spirituality also was designed to teach the India laborer his duty of passivity and obedience to thi class rule. Christ is a Spanish conquistador. And eve if the Virgin of Guadalupe is an Indian, she is a Indian whose whole being is summed up in humbl obedience to her Lord and Master. A spirituality tha divides soul from body, sacred from secular, tha teaches a humble waiting for life after death that ca only endure present evil, all this is analyzed by Lati American liberation theology as the expression of a ideology that supports an unjust system of oppressio and subjugation.

Latin Americans can appropriate this analysis an call it theology precisely because the critique does no exhaust the meaning of God. On the contrary, it clear out of the way the false or idolatrous *use* of th divine image in order to reveal the true God of bib lical faith. This is the God of the prophets and th early Church. Prophetic faith itself began the task o

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ideological critique of religion, as in the Prophet Amos who cried out:

> I hate, I despise your feasts, I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. . . . Take away from me the noise of your songs, to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream. 5:21-24

Heaven and the Kingdom of God have been turned into "pie in the sky by and by" to justify evil on earth. But their authentic message is the revolutionary aspiration for justice on earth. As Marx himself put it:

> Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sign of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people. (From the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, *ibid.*, p. 42.)

The Kingdom of Heaven, which has been used to alienate and pacify the people, must be recovered in its de-alienated meaning; namely, as the demand that "God's will be done on earth, as it is in heaven" of Jesus's prayer. Then, far from being contrary to social faith, it can be discovered to be its true foundation. Christian hope, de-alienated, is recovered as God's mandate to struggle against an evil, oppressive world to create the new heaven and new earth. On this basis Christians and Marxists can cooperate in a common critique of religion (and of Marxist ideology in established Marxist states) and a common social revolutionary *praxis* to create a just and humanized world.

Other liberation theologies, specifically Black Theology in the United States, have been engaged in a similar ideological critique of theology. The separation of religious from social realities is part of the way in which the dominant theology makes God a sanction of the *status quo* and fails to connect the Christian message with social criticism. Language about a Black God, a Black Christ, a Black Theology, a Black Church as redemptive humanity, are intended to unmask the mystification of white power and locate the Christian message on the side of the oppressed race for the sake of the liberation of all humanity, Black and White, from the white Babylon. James Cone of Union Theological Seminary has been the most eloquent spokesman for this type of critique of established theology as white racist ideology.

Perhaps the most challenging voices engaged in the critique of ideology, however, are coming from religious feminists. Latin American and Black theology can point to a judgment on class and national oppression in the Scriptures. But overcoming sex oppression, except for a few hints rapidly covered over within the New Testament, finds little scriptural basis. Theological language, not only in its later development, but in its Biblical roots, seems pervasively patriarchal, justifying in religious law the social subjugation of women. For many, the feminist critique strikes much more directly at the Biblical foundations of God language. If there is an alternative, it doesn't seem to be available through a re-pristinization of Scripture, but by going outside and against Scripture, to suppressed alternatives such as the ancient Mother goddesses.

Feminists suggest that the whole history of God-talk, expressing the alienation of the divine from the human, of soul from body, of transcendence from immanence, with its denigration of earth, body, sexuality and femaleness, is a superstructure the social base of which is the subjugation of women by men. The solution to this cannot be simply more splitting of the natural from the spiritual self, but rather a return to the natural, the earthly, the bodily self as the only true concretization of our spiritual beings.

Feminists can applaud the statement in Paul's epistle to the Galatians 3, 28 that "in Christ there is neither male nor female." But the Christ that overcomes sexist role oppression cannot be one that again alienates us from our real sexual natures, but allows us to appropriate them as ways of being human that do not cast one into a servant relation to the other. This demands not only a profound critique of all the dualisms of patriarchal religion, but also all the social dualisms of male power and female marginalization sanctified by it. Feminists suspect that the Judaeo-Christian God has been too much a part of the problem to be a part of the solution.

The Question of Theodicy

Feminism shares common ground with other liberation theologies, and with Biblical faith, in that it too is a messianic faith. It too engages in the critique of patriarchal ideology in theology in order to clear the way for a vision of a new humanity and new earth when sexist alienation is overcome. It searches for a God-talk that can be the authentic ground of this reconciled world. But it is not at all sure that this God of redemption can be the same one through which so many messages of sexist oppression have been proclaimed in the Bible and the history of theology. Feminists are not the only ones who raise in a new way the contradictions between the God of their redemptive vision and the God of the historical tradition. Jewish reflection on the Holocaust, Black theology and Marxist philosophy also have been ways in which the question of theodicy has been raised.

The classical statement of the conundrum of theodicy is: "if God is all powerful, He must be Evil: If he

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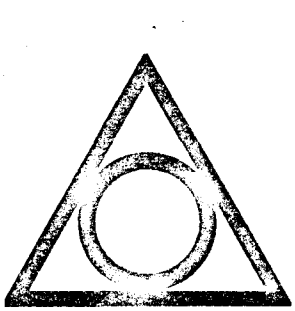
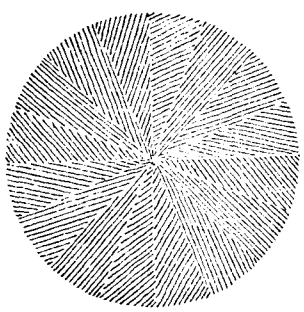
is not evil, he must not be all powerful." The classical image of the all-powerful, sovereign Lord of history, who is, at the same time, all wise and good, does not pan out in the face of historical evil, especially when that evil becomes acute, massive and of great duration. The Scriptures themselves grapple with this problem and develop the idea of Last Judgment to cover the gap between divine justice and historical evil. But why does God allow historical evil? A combination of evil as punishment, evil as opportunity for redemptive suffering and final rightings of wrongs at the End are supposed to cover the gap. If this isn't enough, one can shout loudly that "God's ways are not our ways."

But a God whose ways are too far from our ways, in the sense of elementary principles of right and wrong,





may just be more demon than God. In Richard Rubenstein's book, *After Auschwitz* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966.), the traditional God of Providence and punishment is declared to be dead. Any God whose providential activities to chastise evil could include Auschwitz must be declared a Devil and no God. Similarly William Jones declares, in his book *Is God a White Racist?* (New York: Doubleday, 1973.), that all efforts to reconcile God's providence and sovereignty with the infamy of white racism must be placed under the same indictment. If such a God exists that could use this history of racism for whatever purposes, He is a white racist God and not a liberator of Black people.

The dilemma of all theologies of Liberation seems to be this: that the God who represents our liberation does not seem to be the God who has been in power in history! It is not enough to say that this God will intervene shortly to overthrow an evil world. But what was this God doing before? Why was this God so helpless in the face of centuries and even millennia in which the systems of oppression were being built up, if all this was contrary to "His" will. This dilemma was suggested already within the Jewish and Christian apocalyptic traditions. The God who is manifest in the crucified Christ does not seem to be the God who is Lord of this world. The God of apocalyptic redemption must be out of power in history if this God can appear only in the form of the *Victim*.

Gnostic theology carried this question to its logical conclusion by differentiating an evil God, who is the creator of this present world, from an eschatological God, who is not in power in this world and who represents the redemptive hope. Classical Christian theology rejected this gnostic dualism to assert the unity of the God of creation and redemption. But the conflict was not resolved thereby and becomes acute all over again as the question of historical evil (rather than just individual sin) is raised in theology.

Christian-Marxist Dialogue

Some fruitful theological reflection has been stimulated by Christian-Marxist dialogue. Marxists claim to be atheists. That is, they disbelieve in the God who represents the transcendent halo over the world as it has been. They profess instead to believe in a different kind of transcendence, historical rather than a vertical—a transcendence of future possibilities that can lead this present world to be transformed and changed. In the name of this historical transcendence they reject the God of vertical transcendence that represents, in their mind, the Platonic idealized reification of the present system of the world.

Ernest Bloch, a Marxist philosopher whose work lies behind much of Jürgen Moltmann's and other theologies of hope, has stated the radical dichotomy between these two concepts of transcendence. Bloch ends up with a new dualism between an evil and a good God. The evil God is the Moloch of the historically established world order, the God whose reign has justified the holocaust of blood sacrifice of most human lives on the altar of power and privilege. The good God has appeared only as the crucified Victim, as the oppressed ones stretched on the cross of history.

An alternative world can only appear as utopian visions that radically contradict this dominant social experience. The God of utopia has not been in power in history. This God of Hope is the powerless but never extinguishable aspiration to a different heaven and earth. For Bloch, the greatest blasphemy of the evil world-God is that He has appropriated the eschatological hope of the crucified and turned it into another tool of world domination. This is demonstrated in the sort of Christian consciousness which:

> Bristles at see-through blouses, but not at slums in which half naked children starve, and not, above all, at the conditions that keep three-quarters of the world in misery. It condemns desperate girls who abort a fetus, but it consecrates war, which aborts millions. It has nationalized its God, nationalized Him into ecclesiastic organization and has inherited the Roman empire under the mask of the Crucified. (Ernest Bloch. *Man on His Own*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1970, p. 144.)

It is easy for well-fed Christians to believe that these

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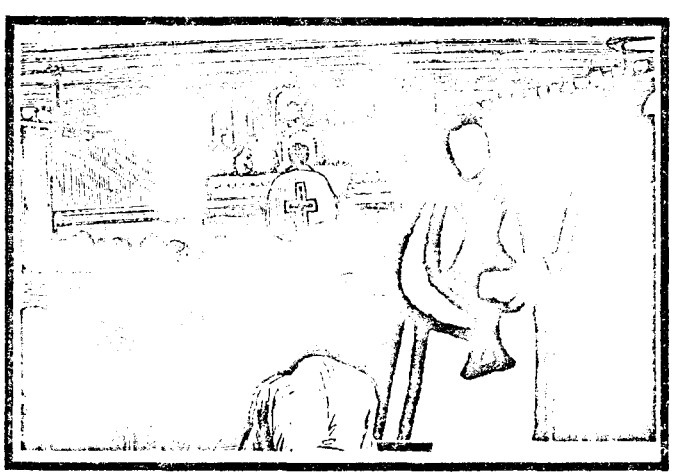
thinkers have exaggerated the problem of evil in relation to the doctrines of divine sovereignty and providence. It seems relatively easy to reconcile these through the concepts of human freedom and sinfulness. It is humanity, through its willful error, that has created the evil world, not God. God is still in charge, nevertheless, guiding all things for the good. God persuades humanity toward the good through freewill, not by force. However, the more seriously one takes the history of evil as a long-term, chronic affair, the less this counter-image of a benign but ineffectual God, who will bring all things to rights in the end, satisfies the dilemma.

In Christ, God gets off the parental pedestal of enunciating of good, but unobeyed, commandments and appears as One who participates in this victimization by the powers of Evil. The conflict between established evil and crucified good is both more acute and more tragic than the ideologies of providence have been able to allow. They touch finally upon the goodness of the God who is "in charge" or conversely, the "inchargeness" of the God who is good.

One way to reconcile the split between the God of Creation and the God of Eschatology might be through process theology. The problem is that the process theologies that have been proposed, from Hegel to Whitehead and his followers, have been epiphenomenal rationalizations of the existing processes of nature and history. They have not taken seriously enough the problem of evil and the disestablishment of those good consequences which their Consequent God is supposed to preserve. Their God is an archive of what has been, not an alternative. If eschatology is the fulfillment, and not just the contradiction, of creation and its God, then in some sense creation as God intended it has been so radically dethroned from history that it can appear only as eschatological hope.

The world upon which God could look and see that it is very good is not a statement about what was in the beginning. It represents a longing for a reconciled world that God and humanity have yet to create out of their sufferings and hopes. A process theology that could incorporate this profound dialectic between creation, history and eschatology might be able to speak to the problem of God in an evil world. But such a theology would have to come from those who, in Marx's words, are not concerned merely "to interpret the world in various ways," but who know that "the point is to change it." (Eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, opt. cit, p. 72.)



Facing questions we tried to avoid

NEW UNDERSTANDING OF THE SACRAMENTS

MONIKA K. HELLWIG

The year is 1978. The task is the plotting of "Theological Frontiers" in sacramental theology: the main schools of thought, the issues most debated, the questions left unanswered for future years. These are, of course, perfectly sensible concerns, yet they somehow fail to meet the present situation. Sacramental theology has moved into a new, quite complex and more subtle mode of operation. There are several dimensions of this new mode of operation, and their implications are worth exploring.

First of all, sacramental theology has gone underground. A survey of publishers' catalogs, academic journals and current book reviews seems to yield very little indeed in terms of conventional expectations—the occasional study on Penance or Holy Orders, an ecumenical symposium on Eucharistic theology, and not much else. However, while sacramental theology is not being addressed in the ways we had come to expect within Catholicism, a great deal is going on that has direct bearing on our understanding of the sacraments.

Much of the historical spadework was done in the forties, fifties and sixties. We became aware of the sacramental activity of the church in its historical developments, shaped by human ingenuity and perversity,

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taking unfortunate as well as happy turns. The painstaking work of historians of the liturgy, such as Josef Jungmann, eagerly disseminated by the liturgical movement, created the climate in which the Dogmatic Constitution, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, could open the floodgates of liturgical reform. It also created the climate in which systematic theologians like Karl Rahner and Edouard Schillebeeckx could raise delicate issues concerning the communication of grace through the sacraments, concerning the meaning of the Eucharist, the questions involved in concelebration, and so on. It created the climate in which the Dutch theologians, following up on lengthy ecumenical endeavors, could suggest a reformulation of the doctrine of transubstantiation in terms of transignification and transfinalization —a climate that also brought an anxious reply from the Holy See in the encyclical *Mysterium fidei*. It seemed at that time that the liturgical reforms of Vatican II and its post-conciliar commission, coupled with the re-examination of the term transubstantiation, had penetrated to the inner sanctum of Catholicism and that nothing significant could really happen after that.

What happened, however, was that sacramental theology in the narrower sense disappeared. The fences around it had been broken down, and the boundless kinds of questions that now had to be asked were so terrifying that they were being asked in very guarded terms, and most of us were trying not to hear them. Our own secularity somehow got far ahead of where we wanted to be. It was one thing to give intellectual assent to the thesis of Henri de Lubac and (independently) of Karl Rahner, that grace is not wholly inaccessible to experience, that the supernatural is a transformation of the reality we apprehend as the natural and not a separate reality floating, as it were, above the natural. However, it is another matter altogether to begin to scrutinize our understanding of the church, its institutions, the role of clergy and hierarchy, the sacraments and their meaning, by the light of this newly awakened awareness. The questions that arise quickly become more radical than one cares to ask.

Once we admit that assertions concerning grace and the supernatural are not beyond critical scrutiny based on human experience, then we are asking what difference the sacraments make on the basis of observation, what role they play in the life of the individual and the community on the basis of observation. We are no longer asking what the sacraments do to or for us (or our children), but what exactly we could and should be doing in, with and through them. The next step is to turn the focus of attention away from the ritual and towards the meaning and goals of Christian life and worship.

The second dimension of the new mode of sacramental theology, therefore, is that besides having gone underground, it has become distinctively lay. The issues being addressed are not primarily concerned with the moment of the ceremony nor with the clerical presence, action, or sanction involved. Thus in the recently translated book of Alexander Ganoczy, *Becoming Christian* (Paulist, 1977), the study of Baptism is entirely devoted to reflection on what it means to be Christian in the ordinary, secular context of our history and our political options. Similarly in *Jesus and the Eucharist* by Tad Guzie (Paulist, 1975), the meaning of "real presence" is elaborated in terms of the total secular context of our lives and relationships. In a series of books and articles, Henri Nouwen has written about the everyday dimensions of healing, conversion reconciliation and support to the broken, the suffering

and the troubled. These are the lay dimensions of the sacraments of Penance and of the sick. From time to time, volumes of *Concilium* have been devoted to death and dying as a universal dimension of human life, to marriage as a common mode of human life and experience, to the tragedy of the broken marriage relationship and the task of Christian support to the partners in a broken marriage. These are the lay dimensions of the sacraments of Viaticum and of Matrimony and to most of us these are the "real" dimensions, the reality that is signified by the signs. Grace becomes visible as transforming power in our experiences, actions and relationships in these dimensions. It is here that grace can be observed.

Sacramental theology has become lay in its preoccupations because there has been a kind of coming of age not only of the laity but of the clergy. It is not so much that we no longer want magic that sanctifies us without our having to change, and makes us God's special pets without our really having to be any better than anybody else. It is not really that we no longer want that kind of magic, but just that many forces

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today conspire to bring us to the rude realization that we can not have the magic. It is not that grace has gone out of fashion. I do not believe that we are in a crypto-pelagian phase of theology, attempting to lift ourselves by our own psychological and sociological bootstraps without benefit of divine intervention. Grace is very much "in," but the theology of grace is no longer to be found in connection with a discussion of the ceremonial of the sacraments. Rather it is found in discussion of the living reality to which the ceremonial points.

The third dimension of the new mode of sacramental theology is closely related to this. Sacramental theology has become essentially spiritual-ascetical theology, and this is surely neither surprising nor disappointing to those who have worked for liturgical, biblical and patristic revival in our times. This outcome has been predictable since the first time a liturgical reformer gave forth the battle-cry: the signs should signify! For several decades much thought and effort and experimentation went into the task of making the signs signify, and this effort continues. We have had a long period of experimentation in making the signs signify with verve and with full participation of all. We have been learning the hard way that the style and emotional tonality which ring true and invite participation in some groups, are felt as inauthentic and alien and resented as psychological imperialism by others. We have been learning, I think, that we need classic styles that are not too explicit in the emotion expressed, not clumsily obvious in the symbolism used, not so comprehensively formulated that all the thinking, imagining and praying is done for us. Most of all, we seem now to be relearning the hard way that the sacraments are, and must be, worship—people turning godwards. But in all of this, the more we succeed in making the signs signify, the more we are thrown back to the hard question whether that which they signify is really happening.

Time was when we could answer with a smile, "*ex opere operato*," not necessarily intending thereby to commit ourselves to too much of a conversion to Christ and the Way. If we did not like the sound of "substitutionary death" there are nevertheless some indications that we flirted dangerously with the hidden assumption of substitutionary conversion. Somehow, the innocent fun has gone out of all this. It is difficult to reflect on the meaning of the sacraments without facing some very uncomfortable questions about the way we live our lives. Questions about infant baptism, about conditions for a valid baptism, and so on, quickly become questions about the difference that baptism should make. These questions do not readily stay in the realm of the academic but present themselves as questions about our own life style. Questions about the Eucharistic presence of Jesus, move rather quickly away from the change in bread and wine to the change in the participant community—which is, of course, where those questions began historically. Questions about the age for Confirmation naturally become questions about the expected outcome of Confirmation, and we are right back in the reflection on what it means in the concrete to live out a Christian commitment. This could be extended also to questions about Penance and reconciliation, about marriage and its ecclesial solemnization as the sacrament of Matrimony, about the Anointing of the Sick and the Ordination of ministers.

For large segments of the Catholic community the time has come in which church, Sunday and sacraments are not able to justify themselves autonomously, without reference to total life style. Less and less is it possible to participate in the sacraments as conditions of church membership while considering the spiritual and ascetical aspects of Christian teaching an optional extra catered by the sodality, holy name society, third order or such. Church as cultural heritage simply does not have the same hold. If people are not personally committed, they tend not to be ritually involved. Theology already mirrors this, in the type of question that is being proposed and resolved, even in those periodicals and books that are professedly about "liturgy," such as the publications of the Liturgical Conference and of St. John's Abbey, Collegeville.

Ecumenism

Sacramental theology, however, has not only gone underground, become lay in focus and concerned with the spiritual-ascetical questions. It has also become irrevocably and inclusively ecumenical. This is more particularly true of Eucharistic theology, as witnessed, for instance, by the Spring 1976 issue of the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*. The move into the ecumenical context has happened, of course, throughout our Catholic theology, but in sacramental theology it has radical consequences. Unthinkable questions become thinkable. Apparently innocent issues like the possibility of intercommunion among Christians of different denominational affiliations glide imperceptibly towards a reevaluation of all church structure and its normative claims. Questions on the Eucharistic presence of Jesus must deal with a far greater range of possibilities when asked in an ecumenical context. They must also deal far more respectfully with new or "unorthodox" positions.

It is, of course, in the first place in the ecumenical context, that those questions are asked concerning ministry and ordination, which eventually call for basic reevaluation of our understanding of the sacraments as mediating grace. The ecumenical context has been causing us to look again at the Reformation questions

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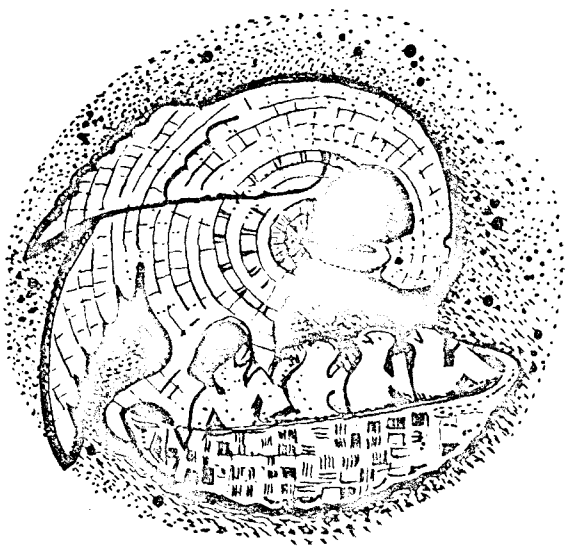
about the relation between ritual and authentic conversion to Christ, and about the relation between official church ministrations and salvation. This is an agenda that can not be avoided indefinitely. Vatican II opened the gates cautiously to a reconsideration of Reformation issues. They, however, having been held back so long, burst upon us very much faster than we are quite able to cope with them. This is not an intellectual problem, as evidenced by the issue of the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* already mentioned. It is largely a problem of community loyalty and solidarity. Whether one asks such questions does not seem to depend on spiritual seriousness or maturity, nor yet on intellectual seriousness or maturity. It seems rather to depend on whether one has been overtaken by radicalizing experiences. This does not seem to happen to all of us. Consequently those engaged in ecumenical dialogue may see some rather radical questions as urgent and central to the Catholic theological endeavor, but at the same time may become painfully aware that they do not speak for the Catholic community at large any more than they speak for the church hierarchy or the clergy at large.

This kind of internal strain, which shows up most clearly in the new-style sacramental theology, is something that is new to the Catholic community in general, though gifted individuals at all times have experienced it. What is particularly distressing is that the Protestant experience of dealing with community conflicts over belief formulations does not really help us. The conditions and expectations are so different. Slowly and painstakingly we are having to reconcile what we know and learn from experience and reflection with authoritative claims from the past voiced by living representatives whose claims to authentic interpretation are both extensive and invested with an aura of the sacred which intensifies them. No serious Catholic theologian wants to undermine the bases of credibility for Catholic faith nor to weaken the solidarity of the Catholic community. Yet suddenly the task has become a very difficult and delicate one because the authentic and necessary questions that present themselves at this stage, seem to threaten the grounds of credibility on which the faith of so many Catholics still rests. One can not write only for the vanguard, nor restrict a discussion only to the professionally qualified. The ideas always escape into public view. Therefore the shift of sacramental theology into the ecumenical arena is an inescapable and probably irreversible move to a style of reflection fraught with conflicts within the Catholic community.

Strangely, this kind of tension and conflict seems to surface very little in Sunday morning parish celebration. It impinges on most ordinary Catholic families for the first time in the instruction offered their children, whether in a sacramental catechesis given to younger children in the parish or in more extensive discussion undertaken with young people in high school or college classes. What can be quietly contained and left implicit in the parish celebrations over a considerable period of time must, of course, become quite painfully explicit when it becomes the subject of a course in Christian doctrine or Christian theology. Moreover, those who teach these courses know that resistance to the pursuit of radical questions, comes not only from the older generation but from the young people themselves. Not everyone is equipped by temperament, intelligence and personal social context, to ask radical analytical questions about personal faith and beliefs. Not everyone can follow Tillich's model of "breaking the symbols" only to find oneself in the end taking back "the broken symbols" and learning to live by them in a certain poverty of spirit that does not ask for more certainty than can be had. Many people only seem to get half way around that circle losing everything, and many others will not set out fearing that that is what will happen to them.

At this point, any responsible Catholic theologian must return to some consideration of what is specific



in Catholicism. Certainly, whatever else it is Catholicism is not for an intellectual, educational, social, or economic elite, but intended for all. This is one of the particular strengths of Catholicism and it appears especially in the practice and theology of the sacraments. That is something which has emerged on the positive side in the ecumenical context. It seems to be clearer to some Protestant partners in the dialogue, such as Langdon Gilkey in *Catholicism Confronts Modernity* (Seabury, 1975) than it has yet begun to be to many of the Catholic participants. However, there are signs of a positive reassessment. One of these, in my opinion, is the fact that in response to the continuing Protestant challenge to our viewing the sacramental life of the church in a seven of pleni-

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tude and universality, there has been no serious move among Catholic theologians to narrow the notion of sacramentality to Baptism and Eucharist alone. Rather there has tended to be a willingness to extend sacramentality more explicitly to all dimensions of life and to resuscitate in new ways the old idea of "the sacramentals."

Contributing to this is the slow but sure emergence of the wider ecumenism which is bringing us into encounter not only with the de-sacramentalizing trends of Christianity found in Protestant communities, but also with Judaism and the great religions of the world with their great wealth of ritual and traditional symbolism. This encounter is and has been a strong counterforce to the demands for secularization, demythologizing, modernization and reduction to a common denominator. The type of approach suggested by the work of Mircea Elaide and initiated in past decades by such books as Louis Bouyer's *Rite and Man* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1963), is yet to fructify. We are still not quite sure what to do with it, but it is obviously the road to a new synthesis. There is no doubt that a sacramental practice and theology that are viable in the present and for the future, must rest on a better appropriation of image, symbol and story than we have made at present. This is still in a twilight phase of sudden recognition and insights that do not yet connect. We have much to hope from encounters with the Hassidic traditions in Judaism, but also from encounters with the traditions and lore of Hinduism. We have much study to do in our own tradition—in our saint lore, our iconography, our hymnody, the symbolism of our mystics and our spirituality traditions. We have tried in some cases to take the symbolism as literally intended prose description. We have seen it in other cases as a mysterious and esoteric language for special people. We have—God help us!—often considered our rich heritage of symbolism as good enough for illiterate peasants and primitives. More latterly, we have simply been terribly ashamed of it and tried to hide it and look as Protestant, modernized, secularized and demythologized as possible. What we have yet to do in a thorough way, is to return to our heritage of symbolism and study it seriously as the normal expression of the community's faith.

A final aspect of the new mode of sacramental theology as it is already being practiced, is that it is eschatological in its orientation and therefore tends to be radical in its questions. What I mean by eschatological, is that the questions asked are in reference to the outcome expected, and therefore ultimately in reference to the content of Christian hope. This has happened in most areas of theology, partly as a result of the "theology of hope" propagated by German Protestant theologians, Juergen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, and of the various socio-critical theologies that have followed from these in Catholic circles. In sacramental theology the effect of translating questions into an eschatological perspective is very liberating. It makes an immense difference to ask what is a "valid" celebration of Eucharist in terms of conditions supposed to have been clearly established at some time in the past (at or close to the origins of the tradition in apostolic times), and to ask what is a truly sacramental celebration in terms of the intended outcome of the Eucharist. Questions about the nature of marriage as sacramental, its dissolubility or indissolubility, the extent and justification of ecclesiastical intervention in and regulation of Christian marriages, and so forth, likewise are handled in completely different ways according to a search for precedent and law in the past or according to the relationship that marriages may have to salvation. Questions about the sacraments of initiation, the proper sequence, the appropriate ages, and so on, are all but insoluble, asked in the light of the ancient practice and the subsequent legislation and interpretation, but become quite tractable when asked in relation to the goals intended.

There is a question here for some Catholics, as to whether this kind of approach denies the divine institution and initiative in the sacraments and their direct link to the person of Jesus the Christ. The shift presupposes an understanding of the presence and action of Christ in the church that is convinced that "present" means now and that "action" means creativity rather than the running of clockwork. It presupposes the influence of Christ on the community that is his church, coming from the end-time, from the projected goal, as well as from the past. It also presupposes church as a community of thinking, imagining, and creatively initiating persons, not a parade of generations through patterns of behavior established long ago and far outside the consciousness of the present participants. In other words, this eschatological focus is really part of the same shift that has tended to make sacramental theology "go underground," become lay, fuse with spiritual-ascetical theology, move into the ecumenical context and tend to be radical. In eschatological focus these dimensions are rather obviously necessary and unproblematic. In terms of our experience of Catholicism within the lifetime of the present generations, the whole shift is not unproblematic but beset with difficulties and insecurities which must be worked through slowly and with participation of the Catholic community, if we are to make any meaningful synthesis for our times.

The one book that is probably the single most helpful contribution to the whole process, among those published in America recently, is the monumental study by Bernard Cooke, *Ministry to Word and Sacraments* (Fortress, 1976). It is "underground" sacramental theology in the sense that it focuses not on the sacrament of Holy Orders, but on the tasks of ministry and the goals

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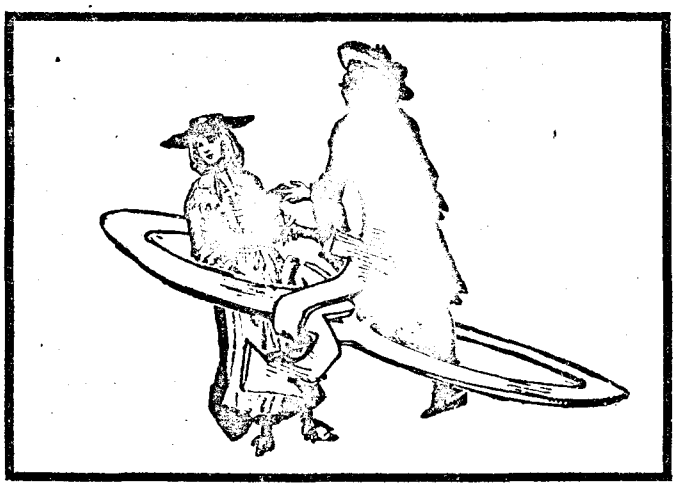
to which they tend. It is, I maintain, in spite of its subject matter, a seriously lay approach because of its concerns, because of its horizons, because of its persistent ordering of the personal dimensions as basic and the institutional or organizational dimensions as derived from and subordinated to the personal. Similarly, it is concerned with the spiritual-ascetical dimensions of ministry as basic and the ritual as derived from and subordinated to it. It is ecumenical not only in the sources on which it draws but also in its assumptions about church and salvation, and this is in part because it is eschatologically oriented. If I were asked to recommend one book as a sample of the current trends in sacramental theology I would have no hesitation at all in recommending this one. Though a large tome (at $25) it is not esoteric. Though concerned with ministry it is neither addressed exclusively to priests, nor concerned exclusively with the ministry of priests. It is concerned with ministry in ways that coax one to rearrange one's whole horizon.

What, then are the questions left unanswered and the tasks in store for the future? Theologically, as I see it, we are still only half way around Tillich's circle. With philosophical acumen we have "broken" the symbols we took too literally. We are very good at that. But we have not yet passed this adolescent triumph in order to come home to our Catholic heritage as adults. We are not very good at that. The training of Catholic theologians and of North Americans in particular, renders them curiously inept for the purpose. We have all been taught not to contemplate, not to imagine, not to take pride and pleasure in the concrete and the particular, not to remember and not to dream. What we are waiting for now is a bursting forth of theologically sophisticated poets, of post-critical contemplatives, to generate within Catholicism what A.J. Heschel called "depth theology."

This is not simply a task for theologians, to be applied later by preachers, catechists and spiritual writers. It is essentially a task in which theologians must engage the living, worshipping Catholic community. Just as instant symbols seldom succeed in becoming part of community consciousness and tradition, so an instant or superimposed new synthesis of the symbols, images, stories and rituals, is very unlikely to be other than alien to the community for which it is intended. Theology grows and sacramental theology grows primarily in life and worship and only secondarily in critical reflection and deliberate attempts at synthesis.



A growing plurality of options

CHRISTIANITY, MARRIAGE AND SEX

FRANCIS X. MURPHY

Prologue.

The attempt to do justice to the Catholic Church's stand on marriage and sexuality at this moment in history is obviously a perilous undertaking. Vatican Council II did nothing to change the traditional ideals and standards that have been part of the church's message from the start in this fundamental area of Christian behavior. But the Council did achieve a total turn about in the church's appreciation of the physiological, psychosocial and conjugal aspects of marriage that has resulted in a basic shift in its evaluation of mankind's sexual propensities.

This change has resulted from a deeper understanding of many aspects of human behavior achieved by modern science. It is also the result of a grave reorientation in contemporary sexual mores, for the church does not exist in a vacuum.

The process of change in this sphere of moral concern has shocked many of the church's faithful who feel that the slightest modification of Catholic teaching in this matter is a betrayal of God's law. What does not seem to bother them is the fact that literally millions of Catholics have been caught in a maelstrom of interior spiritual problems consequent upon a less than

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adequate and, perhaps, an erroneous interpretation of God's law that has grown up in the church over the centuries due to a failure to examine human sexuality in all its aspects. In its most insensitive, preconciliar statement, Catholic sexual morality was summarized:

> "It is grievously sinful in the unmarried deliberately to procure or to accept even the smallest degree of true venereal pleasure; secondly, it is equally sinful to think, say, or do anything with the intention of arousing even the smallest degree of this pleasure." H. Davis, *Moral and Pastoral Theology* 2 (London, 1962) 182.

I.

In a famous TV interview during the debate on marriage at the third session of Vatican Council II (1964), Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani said that the church's teaching on marriage would never change since it was based on "the natural law and a few texts of Scripture."

This offhand assurance by the church's chief custodian of faith and morals—Ottaviani was then the pro-prefect of the *ancien* Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office—summed up a millennial conviction that has prevented the church from coming to terms honestly and realistically with sex as a primary component of marriage and thus as a fundamental human concern.

Ottaviani's attitude betrayed an ecclesial arrogance that had led him and his associates in the papal curia to believe they possessed absolute certainty in their guardianship of the church's moral and doctrinal teaching. Of even greater import was the fact that in their intransigent opposition to change, they foresaw correctly that the slightest mutation in the church's attitude toward marriage would destroy the structure of sexual morality that marked the perennial Catholic stand against venereal indulgence, hedonism and erotic perversion. Sex was for these men an obstreperous element in the human make-up whose only justification was its biological orientation to the procreation of offspring within the confines of marriage. Any other use—in thought, word or deed—was peccaminous.

Over against the Ottaviani stand, under the prodding of pastors and theologians involved with the excruciating sexual and marital problems of the faithful, a determined group of prelates at the Council gradually came to recognize the need for a thorough revision of the church's attitude toward marriage and its involvement with sexuality as a chief component of conjugal love. Despite powerful opposition from the highest echelons of the church's governance, a document was hammered out that introduced a fundamental change in the Catholic concept of marriage. Instead of defining "procreation as the primary end of marriage" the church's Pastoral Constitution described marriage as a "togetherness in love and life." The document then described this love as "eminently human." It was at once a response to the scriptural urging that the "betrothed and the married nourish and develop their wedlock by pure conjugal love and undivided affection"; and an acknowledgement that carnal love was endowed by the Lord with "special gifts of healing, perfecting and exalting" in grace and charity.

In explaining its teaching about conjugal love, the Council insisted that sexuality gave expression to mutual affection, making the partners more sensitive to each other, more concerned, more selfless, and more tender. It created an erotic atmosphere in the home that enhances generosity and cheerfulness, affecting the readiness to bring a new child into the world, and aiding in the upbringing of those already born. Finally, by insisting that conjugal love is the source of fidelity and underwrites the quality of indissolubility, the Council introduced a mystical note suggesting that such love merged the human with the divine.

While the Council reiterated the church's traditional condemnation of the sins that characterized human behavior in the misuse of sex in defiling marriage, it stopped short of analyzing the psychological ills that frequently subsist beneath human waywardness in these matters. Although it recognized the all-pervasive nature of sexuality in the human make-up, it failed to pursue the implications of this realization in regard to the full diapason of human eroticism from infanthood on.

This task is now being pursued by the moralists and theologians whose divergent approaches are causing considerable confusion within the body of the church. A thorough reassessment of sexual values is in progress, looking to the needs of the Christian people before the facts of single and married life in an industrialized society and confronted by the contemporaneous pornographic revolt. Despite the Conciliar achievement in inaugurating this moral revaluation, an obsessionistic reluctance to accept new directions still affects Vatican officials, many bishops and pastors, and a large number of well-to-do Catholics.

Well-meaning advocates of law and order within the church as well as society are suffering under the illusion that Catholic teaching regarding sex and marriage has been uniform and constant from the beginning. They feel that the theory of natural law that the church inherited from Greek philosophy, buttressed by St. Paul's reference to a "law in our inner being," has given the church a thorough understanding of man as a rational animal endowed with an intellect and free will, whose primary functions are to control human emotions and passions—particularly the carnal appetites—in pursuit of virtue.

Acknowledging the effects of original sin as inducing the passions and emotions to obfuscate the intellect and weaken the will, the church insists that God's

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grace supplied through Christ's redemptive death and resurrection is sufficient to enable everyone, and particularly Christians through the use of the sacraments, to advance toward holiness.

At the basis of this concept is a structure of the cosmos as a static creation reflecting the mind of the Immobile Mover, the Eternal Now. Man, in turn, despite the incidental dynamic of his birth, growth and death, is essentially a replica of his forebears with incidental variations of talent, apprehension and creativity. Presiding over man is an eternal law implanted in his rationality that is unchangeable. Against this law man can rebel, but as it reflects the divine essence it never changes.

It is against this concept of natural law that most Catholic thinkers have rebelled. In its place, they are seeking a structure that will reflect man's current knowledge of the universe and his in-depth appreciation of the microcosm that is human nature. In this perspective, Catholic theologians have come to realize that the structure of morality built into the human heart is not a static set of regulations constitutive of human nature. It is rather the cognitive realization of a pattern of dynamic norms generated by the human social experience in history. Conscious of the transcendental parameters of human consciousness, these thinkers believe that the Divine Being is creatively and redemptively present in this process of human growth by which men and women become more truly human and assume more consciously their responsibility for the future of mankind and the world.

Essential to this vision is the presence of Christ, the Divine Redeemer, in the people of God reaching out to encompass the whole of mankind. In the struggle for moral maturity, men and women are not left alone. Born into brokenness, they are nevertheless the constant object of God's concern and God's grace. This is definitely the teaching of the early churchmen such as Irenaeus of Lyons and Clement of Alexandria who portray Christ as the divine pedagogue, guiding men and women as infants out of the pitfalls of their impatience and waywardness, and healing the hurts of their interior being.

II.

In the struggle for renewal it is to the early church that the contemporary moralist must look for both inspiration and justification in his attempt to redimension Christian moral values dealing with sex and marriage. He is not in search of specific answers to problems whose parameters far outdistance the knowledge and experience of early and medieval man. What he is seeking is a framework of Christian experience against which to measure his current endeavors.

The early Christian sexual mores were a direct inheritance of the Jewish ethos. They were given a specific determination by St. Paul whose reflection on the teaching of Jesus brought into focus the eschatological perspectives of the Christian belief and molded Christ's marital teaching into a doctrinal synthesis.

Deploring the immorality and sexual excesses in the world about him, Paul specifies the purpose of marriage as a reduplication of the union between Christ and the church, referring to the latter as a great mystery. While he insists that the celibate state is a more perfect opportunity for living the Christian life, he makes it perfectly clear that the ability to live in that fashion is a special gift of God; that it is intimately connected with freedom to preach the good news of God's message. In dealing with the intimate relations between husband and wife, Paul insists on mutual respect and love indicating clearly that the man and the woman are to provide for each other's needs in the flesh as well as in the spirit.

There can be little doubt that Jesus, Paul, and the other New Testament writers took a definite stance against sexual promiscuity and condemned adultery, fornication, and various sexual impurities—*porneia*—in no uncertain terms. Even the most sophisticated biblical exegete finds it difficult to mitigate the force of the *logion* attributed to Christ: "A man who looks after a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

The early church placed its emphasis on safeguarding the goodness of the body and the legitimacy of conjugal relations in keeping with the Creator's injunction "Increase and multiply," and with Christ's repetition of the Old Testament's insistence that husband and wife be as "two in one flesh." At the same time, a considerable difficulty arose from the eschatological presumption that underlies much of the New Testament thought. Christ's assertion that in the kingdom there would be "neither marriage nor giving in marriage" and his observations about "eunuchs for the kingdom of God" gave the early Christian morality a severely ascetic twist.

The Pauline writings reflect this eschatological perspective. But while Paul makes no effort to confront the psychological problems caused by sexual difficulties other than a mysterious reference to demoniacal influences, he does deal with the actuality of passion and the priorities of conjugal love. What seems obvious is that at least unconsciously, he was influenced by the Stoic notion of contemplation as man's primary purpose. Hence the distractions of the passions and the emotions particularly in the sexual sphere are derogations from the Christian's proper activity—life "in and with and through Christ" to accomplish which Paul "beats his body to keep it in subjection."

What is interesting is that Paul, while indicating that woman's salvation is connected with child-bearing, does

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not insist upon procreation as the purpose of marriage. But he does equate the mutual love of husband and wife with the great mystery involved in Christ's love for his body, the Church.

Both Jesus and Paul condemned the custom of the man's right to repudiate his wife at will. And while Paul reflects the Jewish subordination of the woman to her husband based on the Hebraic anthropology detailed in Genesis—the woman taken from the man's side to be his companion—nevertheless he insists that in Christ there is neither male nor female; and in his own apostolic friendships he shows extraordinary respect for the Priscillas, Chloes, Apaphras and other feminine recipents of his greetings.

The early Christians, following Paul, and greatly influenced by Platonic ideals, were concerned with achieving a proper scale of values and a right ordering of human life. While stressing the virtue of *agape* (charity)

in their community relationship over *philanthropia* (humanitarianism), they were not adverse to using the concept of *eros* as a proper vehicle for the relations of *amicitia* between friends, and of love between husband and wife. What they condemned was an enslavement to the desire for material things—being engulfed by lust, greed, avarice and ambition, and blinded by ignorance and illusion that led to quarrels and disunion of all kinds.

While there is a streak of neurotic obsession with sexual sin, including pruderies, repressions and perversions, within certain manifestations of the Christian experience, preoccupation with sex is actually more of a rhetorical exercise in such irascible churchmen as Tertullian and Jerome whose anti-feminine diatribes echo their Stoic oratorical models.

In its reaction against the public sexual license of the ancient world, and particularly its fear of the close connection between sexuality and religion in the Gnostic and Manichean cults, the early Church eventually worked out a view of bodily and earthly things that was neither a complete acceptance of them as ends in themselves, nor a rejection as evil and hindrances to one's spiritual life. Visible and tangible things were seen as signs on the way to God and his hidden kingdom. This sacramental view was applied particularly to marriage.

Tertullian in the third century witnesses to the fact that marriage was then considered a covenant of love and fidelity leading to great joyousness. "How shall we describe adequately the happiness of that marriage which the Church arranges, the oblation strengthens, upon which the blessing sets a seal, and to which the (heavenly) Father gives his consent?" (To his Wife, 2.8).

In the early church marriage was thus seen as a sacramental covenant with God as a third party and the joys of carnal and spiritual love its primary component. With Augustine, a subtle change is introduced in the western church. He defines marriage as a sacrament whose primary elements are fidelity (*fides*) and procreation (*proles*). But he so platonizes the element of love in marriage that he saddles the church with the impression that carnal love is so dangerous as to be inevitably sinful.

In the thirteenth century Thomas Aquinas attempted to correct that unhappy impression. He was only partially successful. For with the contemporary rise of canon law in the western church, the legists made marriage a contract—a property agreement giving the husband full rights over his wife's body and possessions, and the wife over the husband's body. For all practical purposes, Paul's teaching about the mystery of Christ's love in the covenant between husband and wife was lost sight of.

Gradually the mediocrity of legal precision outlawed considerations of carnal love and eliminated the redemptive qualities of conjugal grace by reducing the church's preoccupation with marriage to the legitimacy of consent and the performance of the coital act as the binding force setting indissolubility into possession. It likewise narrowed the function of sex to the process of procreation relegating the energy, joy, pleasure and love involved in erotic experience to the realm of the sinful—in thought, word or deed—if indulged outside of marriage. The utter irreality of this development was reached in a sexual casuistry exemplified by a "how far can we go?" mentality. It was epitomized in the fact that in preparing the agenda for the discussion of marriage at Vatican Council II, the curial-dominated preparatory commission relegated the notion of love to a footnote.

III.

In evaluating the current struggle to provide the Christian with a new perspective on his or her sexuality, there is no need to enter the debate over the particularities constituted by the older prohibitions of fornication, adultery, homosexuality, masturbation, pre- and post-marital sex, promiscuity and the sexual divaga-

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tions lumped under the biblical *porneia.* Rome has always had an intelligent response when asked for such specifics: "Consult approved authors."

Thus the Holy See has witnessed to the responsible function attributed by the church to its theologians. It has also thus legitimized a pluralism of opinion among the advocates of diverse schools of moral and doctrinal theology.

It is when one becomes aware of the vast majority of contrary opinions that constitute the church's interpretation of its moral imperatives in the sexual order that a new light is shed on the Council's achievement in proclaiming a pluralism in the theological order as proper to the freedom of the sons of God. In this perspective likewise, there is great leeway in interpreting the seeming absolutes of recent Vatican documents dealing with marriage and sexual morality.

What has actually been achieved thus far is a remarkable liberalization—that is, a conditioning in keeping with the human and psychological factors involved —of the church's marital laws.

As a consequence of the Council's teaching that marriage is a covenanted "relationship in love and life," the Rota or main marriage tribunal of the Holy See has recognized the lack of love as vitiating the marriage bond. While intended primarily as a reason for declaring the situation invalid from the beginning, this Rotal decision cannot but be applied to the situation in which love that once existed in a marriage has been totally eradicated and replaced by hatred.

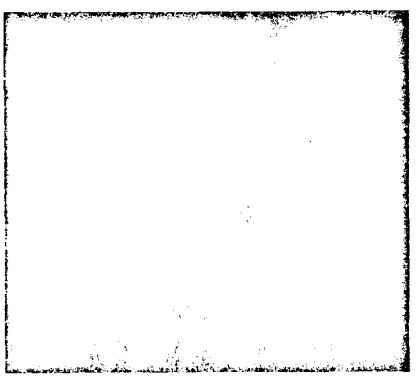
Approved authors are beginning to equate the death of love in a marriage with the physical "until death do us part" and consider the bond shattered. The consequence could be enormous in removing what Morris West called the "scandal in the assembly"—the innumerable so-called bad marriages that have destroyed the spiritual life of millions upon millions of Catholics.

Recognizing that it is no longer sufficient to equate sinfulness with a misuse of the procreative function of sex, moralists have rediscovered the ambiguity of sexuality. Using the insights of depth psychology they have come to distinguish the destructive drives, the attempt at domination, possessiveness, anger and hostility that not infrequently accompany sexual indulgence both in and outside marriage and vitiate what should be an expression of love and affection penetrating to the depth of the person.

One immediate consequence of this revaluation is the fact that the new approach to sexuality is not conducive to an unrestrained permissiveness or promiscuity. It is rather a strengthening of the biblical ideal of becoming "two in one flesh."

An area that still needs exploration at some length is the function of pleasure as such within the exercise of sexuality. The ancient idea that it was a sort of reward for taking on the burden connected with bringing a new life into the world hardly seems adequate as an explanation of so ephemeral an experience. In his *Chastity and the Affective Life,* the Dominican Fr. Daniel Ple has paid considerable attention to the Thomistic discussion of pleasure; and more recently Fr. Andrew Greeley in *Sexual Intimacy* and *Love and Play* has given extended attention to this function of the affective, sexual togetherness. Somewhere between the metaphysical and the eutrapelic approaches, the theologians should be able to discover a defense that will once and for all destroy the church's preoccupation with venereal pleasure as always on the verge of the sinful.

At the same time the Church at the ground level is reacting positively to the notion of love as an essential element in marriage by insisting on a proper



preparation for marriage and encouraging movements such as Marriage Encounter and other family associations as well as counseling services and clinics. Involved in this phase of the church's matrimonial thinking is the whole diapason of depth psychology considerations whereby marital relations are seen as a healing and reconciling experience.

It is this development that will provide the answer to the great breakdown of family integrity that is skyrocketing the divorce rate even among committed Catholics. It should supply the truly Catholic answer to the "anti-life" and hedonistic movements so vociferous in contemporary society.

The attention being focused on family life in the exploited and depressed areas of the world by missionaries dedicated to spreading social justice as the Word of God, and the redemptive presence of Christ in action has multiplied enormously. Despite the Holy See's cautions and objections to what it calls a "contraceptive mentality" the church on the frontier of society is reacting to the new consciousness of woman's dignity and the right to control fertility guaranteed to the family in the Council's documents. In the context of the quality of life, there is great cooperation between the missionaries and humanitarian organizations dedicated to uplifting the downgraded to a level where they can bring children into the world with some hope of giving them the essentials of human dignity.

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Among the achievements of the post-conciliar debate is the fact that in its Declaration Regarding Sexual Ethics, the Holy See has accepted the absolute nature of sexuality as the foundation of the human person.

> According to contemporary scientific research, the human person is so profoundly affected by sexuality that it must be considered as one of the factors which give to each individual's life the principal traits that distinguish it. In fact it is from sex that the human person receives the characteristics which, on the biological, psychological, and spiritual levels, make that person a man or a woman, and thereby largely condition his or her progress towards maturity and insertion into society.

Had the Declaration stopped there it would have contributed an exceptionally positive element to the current debate. Instead, it reiterated the absolutes of previous ages, contributing to the confusion rather than the enlightening of the church.

A good instance of the plurality of options within the thinking of the Holy See itself is provided by two documents dealing with masturbation—the 1974 Instruction emanating from the Congregation for Catholic Education and the 1975 Declaration on Sexual Ethics. The latter document condemns the practice outright as objectively a grave sin; while the former cautions that "fears, threats, or spiritual intimidation are best avoided" when dealing with this youthful disfunction. Encouraging counselors to aim at forming a balanced sexual attitude, the Educational Document warns against the formation of obsessions that could drive the individual further into a narcissistic self-devaluation.

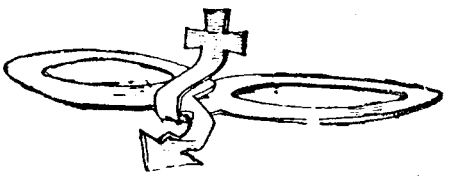
Obviously ignoring this document's directives, the Vatican Declaration characterizes masturbation as "a deliberate use of the sexual faculty outside normal conjugal relations . . . that contradicts the finality of the faculty." It thus falls back into a biological moralism that was discarded by the Council when it spoke of a morality determined by the "nature of man and his acts."

The Vatican Declaration adopts a similar, condemnatory stand in regard to homosexual acts. However, it does distinguish between homosexuality induced by exposure to untoward experiences and homosexuality apparently engendered by innate instinct or a pathological condition.

Of considerable interest in this regard is the tolerance for a homosexual style of life expressed by one of the authors of the Declaration in an interview in the Italian weekly *Europa*. While denying the possibility of accounting such a relation as conjugal, he judged it the lesser of two evils if it satisfied the mutual desire for affection, stability and peace.

In the attempt to achieve a reorientation of the sexual divergences that constitute fornication and adultery, moralists now concentrate on the aspect of wholeness and growth that is to be achieved or hindered by these relationships. In the past, the Judeo-Christian ethic took its criterion from the subordinate status of women, the importance of children, and a definite hostility toward sexual pleasure.

Today these societal factors are changing rapidly. Along with the ability to control fertility, women are vindicating their equality with men in all spheres of endeavor; and societies are concluding that instead of populating their territory, it is rapidly becoming necessary to control population growth. These social changes inevitably demand a new dimension to a morality that sees sinfulness in extramarital sex. And this orientation is being supplied by the psychological insights into the essence of the human person— an individual who is achieving his or her physical, intellectual, affective and spiritual dimensions within the social, economic, political and religious parameters of a particular society.



What the new morality sees is the requirement that human behavior, to be whole, must engage the complete person. Thus behavior that concentrates exclusively on the sexual, on the intellectual or on the physical to the exclusion of other human interests, or that attempts to utilize another person exclusively for selfish purposes is a disorder, and potentially sinful. While seemingly vague in comparison to the absolutes "you shall not masturbate, you shall not fornicate, you shall not commit adultery" this requirement of wholeness is actually a more stringent moral absolute. Its obverse is likewise more in keeping with the Pauline admonition that we are to grow into Christ by loving the total person that is the image of God in us, and the image of Christ in our neighbor.

IV

Slowly but surely the church as the people of God under the tutelage of its thinkers and concerned apostles both clerical and lay is reacting in a healthy fashion to the demands of the sexual revolution affecting both the church and society. While the Holy See and the hierarchy more generally are exercising great caution as is their function as conservers of tradition, committed faithful are facing up to all phases of sexuality as it affects the growth of the individual and the well-being of Christian marriage.

Conscious of the fact that the Catholic attitude

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toward sexual morality is a powerful factor in molding the culture and civilization of the modern world, the church is striving to overcome its inner confusion and controversies to present not so much a solid front as a benevolent and positive example of a society at home with its own sexuality.

While Roman documents by their very nature will continue to proclaim the church as "the pillar and bulwark of the truth," and claim the assistance of the Holy Spirit as she "ceaselessly transmits without error the truths of the moral order," the people of God who constitute that church must give witness to that truth by recognizing the involvement of the church's sexual teaching in solving personal problems honestly, and in providing for the demands of social justice among the downtrodden and the exploited.

It must likewise reach out after the hidden things of man's destiny of which sexuality is a symbol. As a dynamic force within man's inner self oriented toward another being, sexuality was recognized by Plato as the imprint on the instinctual level of mankind's ontological relationship to the transcendent Other.

Vatican Council II has now recognized this function of human sexuality as somehow touching on divinity not merely by its relationship to procreation, but in its witness to man's own inner truth. "Under the gentle disposition of the Divine providence," the Council asserts, "mankind can come to perceive ever increasingly the unchanging truth," even in the sexual order.

Searching for the specifically theological

THEOLOGY CONFRONTS TECHNOLOGY AND THE LIFE SCIENCES

JAMES M. GUSTAFSON

That persons with theological training are writing a great deal about technology and the life sciences is clear to those who read *The Hastings Center Report, Theological Studies* and many other journals. Whether *theology* is thereby in interaction with these areas, however, is less clear. For some writers the theological authorization for the ethical principles and procedures they use is explicit; this is clearly the case for the most prolific and polemical of the Protestants, Paul Ramsey. For others, writing as "ethicists," the relation of their moral discourse to any specific theological principles, or even to a definable religious outlook is opaque. Indeed, in response to a query from a friend (who is a distinguished philosopher) about how the term "ethicist" has come about, I responded in a pejorative way, "An ethicist is a former theologian who does not have the professional credentials of a moral philosopher."

Much of the writing in the field is by persons who desire to be known as "religious ethicists" if only to distinguish themselves for practical reasons from those holding cards in the philosophers' union. Exactly what the adjective "religious" refers to, however, is far from obvious. If it refers to something as specific as "Christian" or "Jewish," or even "Protestant" or "Catholic," presumably writers would be willing to use the proper term. Again Ramsey is to be commended; one can ask for nothing more forthright than his 1974 declaration, "I always write as the ethicist I am, namely a Christian ethicist, and not as some hypothetical common denominator." If "religious ethicists" would even say what the "religious dimensions" of the problems were, we could place the adjective in some frame of reference: Tillichian, Deweyan, Luckmannian, Geertzian or what have you.

The difficulties in formulating a theological (and not merely moral) confrontation with technology and the life sciences are real, and not just apparent, as any of us who have written in this area knows. Unless the intended readership is one internal to the theological community, communication problems are exacerbated beyond the ordinary. Much of the writing is done for

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persons who are making policy or choices in the areas of technology, biological experimentation and clinical medicine. While there is a self-consciously Catholic constituency among these professional persons (for example, the members of the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds who sponsor *The Linacre Quarterly*), and while there may well be constituencies from the evangelical wing of Protestantism, most of the professional persons the writers seek to influence are judged not to be interested in the theological grounds from which the moral analysis and prescription grows. (I recall attending a party after a day of meetings with biologists and physicians at which a biologist, made friendlier by the ample libations provided, said to me, "Say something theological, Gustafson." I had the presence of mind to utter a gutteral and elongated "Gawd.")

Not only is the audience frequently uninterested in the theological principles that might inform moral critique, but also the problems that are addressed are defined by the non-theologians, and usually are problems that emerge within a very confined set of circumstances. Should one cut the power source to a respirator for patient *y* whose circumstances are *a, b,* and *c?* Although the stakes are much higher, this is not utterly dissimilar to asking whether $8.20 an hour or $8.55 an hour ought to be paid to carpenter's helpers in Kansas City. Even a clear and well developed principle of distributive justice would not easily answer the latter question. To ask what "theology" might say to that question is patently more difficult. Obviously it is not easy to give a clearly theological answer to a question that is formulated so that there are no theological aspects to it. To make the practical moral question susceptible to any recognizably theological answer requires nursing, massaging, altering, and maybe even transforming processes, When these processes are completed one might discover that a different set of issues are under discussion from those that originated the interaction.

To respond to specific questions requires more acumen in moral reasoning than it requires theological learning and acumen. I am sure that the writers of the manuals in medical moral theology were well schooled in the tractates on the Trinity; the bearing of these texts on their medical moral discussions, however, is at best remote. It is quite understandable, then, that theology (either as doctrine from an historic tradition, or ideas about the "religious dimensions" of life) tends to be displaced in the attention of the writer by ethical theory and by procedures of practical moral reasoning.

In the Catholic tradition with its continued development of natural law as a basis for ethics an intellectual legitimation for the autonomy of moral theology developed; the natural moral order was itself created by God so the natural order was God's order. Ethical analysis and prescription was theological in principle; moralists were theologians by being moralists. Enough said about theology. Unfortunately, in this tradition the resources and dimensions of theological reflection became confined to a basic theological authorization for ethics, and almost nothing more. And the ethical questions were stirred by particular acts about which judgments of moral rightness or wrongness could be made. It did not occur to these moralists, for example, to wonder if the prophets' critiques of the worship of Baal might not provide, by an act of imagination if not by well developed analogy, some basis for a theological criticism of the excessive scrupulosity that the moral enterprise itself might promote.

A brute fact, and a source of some embarrassment in discourse with the professionals in technology and the life sciences, is the lack of consensus among theologians on some rather simple matters. What is it that theologians think about and write about? What is the subject matter of theology? The high degree of *anomie* among practicing theologians, and the uncertainty among some as to what defines their work as theological, is hardly an asset to any interaction between "theology" and technology and the life sciences. A tired old story from the years of the banquet circuit of the National Conference of Christians and Jews comes to mind. A priest, a Protestant minister and a rabbi were asked to respond to the same question. The priest began, "The Church teaches that . . ." The rabbi began, "The tradition teaches that . . ." The minister began, "Now I think that . . ." There are very good historical and intellectual explanations for the extension of a kind of Protestant *anomie* to the theological enterprise as a whole, but explanations of why it is hard to answer the simple question "what is the subject matter of theology?" do little to identify a melody in a collective cacophonous response. I can readily cite coherent passages from Tillich on technology, Barth on clinical medical moral problems, Rahner on the uses of genetic knowledge, and Ramsey on why Richard McCormick's Jesuit probabilism requires a rigorist response, but I see no way in which I can find from among them a basis for a generalization about how theology confronts technology and the life sciences.

We know what many of the *moral* issues are in technology and the life sciences; we are not sure what the "religious" or *theological* issues are. While debate continues about what moral principles ought to be decisive in determining courses of action in the life sciences and technology, at least the principles under debate can be formulated with some conceptual precision. Much of the literature deals with such matters as the rights of individuals, the preservation of individual self-determination, the conditions under which others might exercise their own self-determination, and the consideration of what benefits and whose good might justify overriding the rights of individuals. Certain principles are invoked constantly: informed consent, risk-benefit ratios, dis-

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tributive justice, and so forth. There are procedures for justifying particular judgments; there are complex prescriptions like double-effect.

Nothing of comparable detail and precision exists in the more strictly theological realm of discourse; and for various theological reasons the sorts of questions a previous generation asked—such as "What is God doing in these circumstances?" or "What is God saying to us through these crises?"—appear to be very odd and unanswerable. Ethics provides a basis for a new casuistry that is indispensable as long as the issues are framed by the professional persons who have to make particular choices, and as long as the terms of discussion are those on which there can be some consensus, namely ethical terms. No doubt there can be a theological justification for the casuistry, but then there can also be a lot of other, non-theological justification for it. The ethical questions have become fairly clear, and to an ethical question one gives an ethical answer, whether one is a physician, engineer, philosopher or theologian. The theological questions are not clear, and as a result frequently even those writers trained in theology neither attempt to make them clear, nor attempt to answer those that can be asked.

Matters of Belief

I have long believed, and often said, that many of the debates that are passionately conducted within the framework of ethics are misplaced, and that the issues that divide persons are matters of beliefs (whether theological in function or in fact, or whether moral or something else we need not decide here) and loyalties which determine our value choices. Paul Ramsey's Beecher Lectures at Yale, from which came the widely read *The Patient As Person,* provoked a discussion between an internist and surgeon both of whom worked in the renal program. The internist was much taken by Ramsey's argument, and vehemently supported the Uniform Anatomical Gifts Act, an act stipulating in precise detail the consent procedures for using an organ from a corpse. The surgeon strongly expressed the opinion that hospitals and their staffs ought legally to be authorized to "salvage" from corpses any usable organs that might benefit the health and prolong the life of patients. There certainly are ways to deal with the controversy between these two that might lead to some agreement—that might determine whether to pay the carpenter's helpers $8.20 or $8.55 an hour. The precision of the debates at the level of casuistry is not to be demeaned. But the difference between these two physicians really stemmed from more general beliefs and valuations, and these divergences will not be settled, or even addressed, by the latest refinement of the principle of double-effect and its application to cases in the operating room.

Who ought to address these differences? What is the agenda for exploring them? What are the grounds for convictions about the "limit questions," to use Stephen Toulmin's phrase? In a most technical sense, perhaps, these are not yet "theological" questions; but surely they demand a response that is more "theological" than casuistic. And surely there are resources in the religious traditions, in speculative natural theologies, and in the discussions of "religious dimensions" that can be used at least to frame the questions and explore answers to them.

A different example reveals the need for another kind of discourse which at least approaches "theology" if it is not theology. How one understands the relation of self and society, how this relationship is interpreted and conceptualized has profound effects upon the outcome of very specific answers to specific questions. I shall illustrate this too simply by suggesting that the competing metaphors used to depict this relationship are the mechanistic and the organic. The first understands society basically in contractual terms; society is a structure that individuals voluntarily agree to institute and develop. The second understands society, obviously, in organic terms; society is a network of interrelatedness and interdependence in which the relations of the parts are "internal" (I do not intend to invoke a whole Hegelian view by using this term), and in which the development of the well-being of the whole must be considered if not supreme, at least on par with the well-being of its individual members. The population geneticist tends to take the latter view; when he or she speaks of "benefits," the reference is to the human species. When the ecologist speaks of benefits, the reference is to the well-being of life on the planet. Physicians and most persons writing about ethical issues in medicine and the life sciences have consciously or implicitly adopted the more mechanistic metaphor, and not without some good reasons. Those who use the organic metaphor are more ready to justify overriding an individual "right." If there is any plausibility to my observations, it is fair to ask who is responsible to think about such matters of basic perception, in this case of the relations of individuals to society. What data and warrants support alternative views, and which view in the end appears more adequate?

Another example refers more specifically to Christians and their doctrinal differences. I have argued elsewhere that Karl Rahner's apparent openness to certain kinds of experimentation on humans is a reasonable conclusion from his philosophical and theological anthropology, and from his understanding of the relations of grace and nature. This openness so alarmed Paul Ramsey that he described it as "remarkably like a priestly blessing over everything, doing duty for ethics" and yet Rahner's attitude rests firmly on theological and philosophical grounds.

If one does not like Rahner's openness (which is

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really very guarded and has several severely restraining principles) one has to argue with his theological and philosophical anthropology and with his views of the relations of grace and nature. If one is persuaded that Rahner's theology is the best available for the Catholic Church today (and the number of dissertations sympathetically exploring his thought suggests that quite a few people are so persuaded), then one ought to come out in moral theology somewhere within the range of his conclusions. If one is concerned that Rahner's openness is morally dangerous in its potential consequences, perhaps one ought to examine one's own theological anthropology, and one's own views of grace and nature. The proper argument is not to be confined to the con-

sequences of relatively closed or open positions but must pursue the question further, to the adequacy of doctrines of God and different anthropologies. A *real* theological discussion then becomes unavoidable.

In the course of such an argument an apparently astounding matter might be seen, namely that one's theological convictions and their articulation in principles about the character of ultimate reality and about human life have a fundamental bearing on one's attitude toward the life sciences and technology. This bearing, in fact, might be more significant in determining one's particular moral preferences than the specific principles chosen to justify a particular decision. It might turn out that passionate ethical debates about technology and the life sciences are missing the crucial point where the real differences lie, and (my goodness!) "ethicists" might have to become theologians! They might find an agenda that would give them something distinctive to do!

To be trained in theology should alert one to aspects of discussions that are otherwise hidden. Several years ago a number of us participated in an intensive conference with research and clinical geneticists. One of the papers was rather more utopian in outlook than the others; its author limned out a vision of the vast benefits to the human race that would accrue from vigorous pursuit of genetic research. I call such scientists "hawks." The paper generated a very passionate discussion, mostly by other scientists and clinicians. Among them were the "doves." Indeed, the rhetoric in the discussion was what those of us alert to religious language could only call apocalyptic. One could interpret the whole discussion as a contest between competing eschatologies: prospects for a universal salvation pitted against prospects for eternal annihilation. The arguments were finally not about matters of hard science; there were some discussions about whose extrapolations from the known to the unknown were most reliable, and about the time frame in which certain possibilities (such as cloning of humans) might occur. But what really divided the disputants were questions that traditionally have been judged to be religious in character.

Most apparent was the question "For what can we hope?" And that could not be answered without asking, in effect, "In whom can we trust?" and "In what can we trust?" Also in dispute were answers to the question "What is desirable?"—which to my mind, incorrigibly saturated with Biblical and theological language, becomes "What are the proper objects of our love?" I feel I do not unduly alter what went on there if I say we were in the midst of a discussion of hope, faith and love. We were also in a discussion of the proper objects of hope, faith and love. No one proposed the Pauline answer, "Your hope is in God." Or the more general Christian answer, "Trust in God." Or the Augustinian answer, "God is the proper object of desire." But the discussion was about whether one should trust chance, or the evolutionary process with minimal intervention, or scientists and statesmen who have power to intervene. The house could readily have been divided between the Augustinians and Pelagians on other questions: the extent of "free will" and the depths of human corruption. It cannot be said that my intervention, in which I pointed out these themes, turned the conversation to one about theology, and certainly about Christian theology, as a subject in itself. I do believe, however, that something dawned in the consciousness of some participants: theology might not provide answers you like to accept, but it can force questions you ought to be aware of. To paraphrase the title of an article by H. Richard Niebuhr, in these circumstances theology is not queen, but servant.

This article ought to have made clear my criticisms of the interchange between theology and technology and the life sciences as long as that interchange is confined merely to the "ethical." With equal severity I would criticize those who confine the theological discussion to *Zeitgeist*, ethos and other comparably general terms. To be honored in such theologians is their radically prophetic stance. They know golden calves when they see them, and they see them sooner than persons preoccupied with how to get from one oasis to the next in

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the Sinai of contemporary culture and society. I have been accused, in my preoccupation with some matters of a casuistic sort with "rearranging the deck chairs on the *Titanic.*" Valid charge. My equally nasty retort to those critics is that they think the only proper response is to jump in the North Atlantic and push the icebergs away.

Whether or not one uses the religious language of idolatry, the attack on ethos and *Zeitgeist* implies a call to radical repentance, to a turning away from the Baals of technology whose reliability is bound to fail, and to whom cultural devotion can only lead to desolation for the coming generations. What the culture is to turn from is clear; that it is to return to Yahweh is not necessarily proclaimed. That persons and society are in bondage to the powers of technology, that they are looking for a "salvation" in medical therapy that therapy cannot give them, these are poignantly indicated by the contemporary prophets. That the need is for liberation from bondage, and that some fundamental conversion of individuals and of ethos is required, these points are well made. The sickness is "global" and the antidote must be sufficient for the poison. The creative and exasperating French Protestant Jacques Ellul is one such prophet; he works out of a highly biblical and confessional theology. Not only technology and science, but programs of social revolution and churches feel the sting of his prophetic rhetoric. For him and others like him, technology tends to become reified as a demonic power which only the power of the crucifixion can overcome.

Myopic casuists need strong enough lenses to see the point of the radical theological critics. On the other hand, the perspectives of the radical prophets make conversation with persons who specialize in technology and the life sciences very difficult. If they cannot address the specific and concrete manifestation of the ethos (if it can be said to exist independently) in the particularities of cases and policy choices, if they cannot show how their theologies address the issues as they arise out of specific activities, conversation never gets down to the ground. Many theologians who are critics of culture write for other theologians and for a half-converted religious readership even when they are writing as theologians of culture—technological culture, "modern" culture, or what have you. Indeed, often when they write about the *need* for theology to be engaged in criticism of technological and scientic culture, they are addressing a like-minded group. Why not *test* the need and the practice on an endocrinologist who researches testosterone levels?

Sometimes it turns out that those who are famous as prophetic critics of culture have nothing very specific to say about any particular event in technology and the use of the life sciences. We are told, for example, that a theology of hope addresses social and cultural issues. It turns out that the principal point of the address is that present institutions and cultural values are ephemeral and relative, and we ought not to absolutize them. Thanks a lot! Any student of the history of science and technology knows that. That does not assist the committees on experimentation on human subjects on which I sit to decide whether protocol #6172 is acceptable from a moral perspective. That particular *Titanic* has not yet sunk, and there is merit in arranging things so that it can stay afloat for some time in the future, or at least in organizing things so the lifeboats can be used

effectively. Theology cannot push the icebergs away. It might at least help to develop the radar technology that aids in avoiding them.

The moralists find a vocabulary enabling them to interact with the professionals from technology and the life sciences; this tends to limit the theological questions. The prophetic theologians find a vocabulary that is somewhat "theological" in some sense which enables them to interact with other theologians and with other prophetic critics of the ethos; this tends to limit their capacities to relate to the specific occasions in which critical choices have to be made.

Since this is my occasion for broadsides, yet another group of writers can be noted. They are those concerned about the relations between "religion" and "science." Frequently both terms are abstractions: these writers are not concerned about the relations of Judaism to human genetics. They frequently publish in that very interesting journal called *Zygon.* Their intention is to humanize technology and science with some sense of the sacred, and to scientize theology with arguments that presumably support "religion." While it is the case that all modern theology continues to reel from the impact of the Enlightenment, and that theologians continue to find philosophical bases on which to justify the existence of religion (or "the religious" as some like to call it), on the whole this synthetic enterprise is not in the best of

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repute philosophically, scientifically, or theologically and for some substantial reasons.

"Sciences are a fundamental resource for theology," writes Ralph Wendell Burhoe, a person seldom cited by professional theologians but more widely known than Van Harvey or Gordon Kaufman or David Tracy by groups of scientists interested in the relations of science and religion. Burhoe is confident. He writes, "I suggest that before this century is out we shall see all over the world an increasing integration of information from the sciences into the heart of the belief systems of traditional religions. I prophesy human salvation through a reformation and rehabilitation of religion at a level superior to any reformation in earlier histories, a level high above that of Jasper's axial age as that was above the primitive religions of 10,000 B.C. . . . The new religious and theological language will be as high above that of five centuries ago as contemporary cosmology is above the Ptolemaic, as contemporary medicine, agriculture, communications and transportation concepts are above those of the fifteenth century." Burhoe's program is in sharpest contrast with those theologians that Kai Nielsen has called "Wittgensteinian fideists" who separate religious consciousness and language from scientific consciousness and language in such a way that the former is virtually rendered immune from any criticism by the latter.

In effect the writers of whom Burhoe is fairly typical aspire to develop both theology and ethics on the basis of science, and the life sciences seem to have a privileged place in these proposals. The enterprise is not novel, and different proposals come forward from it about the biological bases for ethics, for knowledge of ultimate reality, and for other matters. Now, no less than in previous decades, it is fraught with difficulties that have frequently been indicated by philosophers of science, philosophers of religion, and moral philosophers. Inferences from scientific data and theories to theological and ethical conclusions are often weakly warranted. The enterprise has the merit of a challenge, however. Can we think theologically and ethically on the basis of what we know about biology? If we find an affirmative answer to the question unacceptable, at least we have to give our reasons for that, and we are left with the chore of figuring out just how knowledge of biology relates to ethics and theology. That is a philosophical and theological probem as important for one aspect of culture as the relation of Marxist theory to ethics and theology for another.

What can be anticipated about theology's "confrontation" with technology and the life sciences? I have amply distributed my criticisms so that few, if any, theologically trained writers in this field are exempt, including myself. I have not described the social, historical and institutional contexts in which the discussions increasingly occur. As far as the ethical responses are concerned, what was a lively, interdisciplinary enterprise even a decade ago has increasingly become a separate profession, if only because the volume of literature has exponentially increased so that it takes a fulltime effort to be in control of it. Theologically trained writers had a prominence a decade ago that is receding and will continue to do so. Their prominence was in part the effect of the concern that religious communities had for practical moral questions, a concern that moral philosophers, until very recently, looked upon with haughty disdain. Now philosophers, physicians and many other professions are contributing a larger portion of the literature than was the case. Separate institutes, national commissions, advisory committes and other organizations have come into being. Theologically trained persons have not been excluded from participation in these, and indeed continue to be significant contributors, but insofar as the contribution of the "theologians" has been and continues to be "practical moral philosophy," the basis of their being attended to is shared by practitioners who are at least as skillful as they are. Competence in argumentation is the criterion by which their contributions will be judged, and a number of them will continue to be highly respected.

Usage and Interpretation

But what if "theologians" choose to be clearer about what the theological issues, or the "religious dimensions," are in the life sciences and technology? I grant that some anxieties will arise. There is not a wide world waiting to hear about these ideas, since they do not immediately assist in determining what constitutes a just distribution of health care resources. There may, however, be more people out there who are interested than we presently recognize. Traditional theological language, and perhaps also the efforts to decontaminate its historical particularities with the language of natural theology or of religious dimensions, will require some skillful usage and significant interpretation. Timidity might be as much a restraining factor as are the objectively real problems in undertaking such discourse. Theologians and other religious thinkers seem highly self-conscious of their own cultural relativity; they often forget that other areas of thought share the same plight. It will have to be accepted that not everyone in that highly esteemed secular technological culture will be interested in the contributions of theologians, but that some persons (even some with social power) might.

In the meantime there are still a large number of people who attend churches, and who seem not fully alienated from traditional religious language and practice. They fall sick, have unexpected pregnancies, vote for legislators who in turn vote on health insurance plans and funding of research. Catholic moral theologians are more conscious of that constituency than are

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Protestants. Perhaps there is quite a bit to be done to help these persons understand technology in the light of their religious faith and convictions!

In the matters I have been discussing as in so many others, my impression is that much theological or "religious" writing is directed to the justification of an enterprise in the eyes of persons who are not really interested enough to care whether the justification is adequate or not. (I worked for years on a book *Can Ethics Be Christian?* with the nagging sense that most persons who answer in an unambiguous affirmative would not be interested in my supporting argument, that a few fellow professional persons might be interested enough to look at it, and that for those who believe the answer is negative the question itself is not sufficiently important to bother about.) While theologians ought to continue to participate competently in the public debates about matters of technology and the life sciences, they would also do well to attend to the home folks who *might* care more about what they have to say. I am not suggesting that theologians are the best retail communicators, but that the historically identifiable religious communities are fairly obvious loci to be taken into account in writing theology and theological ethics in relation to technology and the life sciences.

It is the "religious ethicists" who have most to be anxious about, in my judgment. They will have either to become moral philosophers with a special interest in "religious" texts and arguments, or become theologians: Christian theologians, or natural theologians, or "religious dimensions" theologians. Only indifference to what they are writing, or exceeding patience with inexcusable ambiguity, can account for the tolerance they have enjoyed.

How can we write theology otherwise?

TOWARD A POLITICIZED CHRISTIANITY

PHILIP SCHARPER

The term, "political theology," seems of rather recent coinage, a fact which permits those who wish, to dismiss it as another of those theological fads which have bedazzled and bedeviled the churches for upwards of two decades: the death of God, the secular city, theology of hope, theology as autobiography, theology as narrative, etc. The obvious irony is that, however recent the term, the reality of a political theology and a theologically impregnated politics is almost as old as recorded human experience, and as new as the Vatican's efforts to prevent repeal of Italy's contraceptive and divorce laws.

The Old Testament is heavy with theological reflection on the realities of Israel, and prophetic words of reproach for the present and promise for the future in the political life of the people.

The New Testament begins with a census politically decreed by Augustus, which determined where Christ was born. Centuries of a dominantly legalistic interpretation of Christ's death could never quite obscure the fact that the cross was not an altar of sacrifice but a diabolically cruel instrument for the torture-death of Rome's political subversives as well as dangerous criminals. The New Testament ends with an exile on Patmos describing the hounding out of Jesus's followers by a political regime which John described as bestial.

The problem would be not to justify the fact of political theology, but to write the history of theology otherwise: Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Cromwell, Jonathan Edwards, Bonhoeffer, J.C. Murray, Popes John and Paul.

The reference to Pope John XXIII helps situate much of the current interest in political theology. In the mid-1960s European Christian and Marxist thinkers began a series of meetings designed to chart their differences and, more importantly, to probe their common hopes for the future of humanity. The climate for these meetings seemed propitious. The spirit of

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Pope John was opening the church to the world and the world to the church. The decline of Stalinism revealed cracks in the Marxist monolith, and such major Communist Parties as those of France and Italy were opting for accommodation and pluralism.

The crackdown on Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the expulsion of Roger Garaudy from the French Communist Party in 1970 showed that it was still far from high noon for the Christian-Marxist dialogue, but at least a new day had dawned.

Garaudy had been a leading participant in the European dialogue, and had brought that dialogue to the United States, most notably, perhaps, in his series of discussions with Quentin Lauer, S.J., of Fordham University. In the 1950s Garaudy had been a hard-line Marxist, an unpromising candidate for authentic dialogue of any kind. In the 1960s he had changed. One of the values he discovered in Christianity was its insistence on both the possibility of and need for *metanoia,* conversion, continuing fresh starts.

This realization, in turn, suggested to Garaudy a Marxian rethinking of religion. It could be regarded as an opiate, lulling the masses into an acceptance of the unacceptable and defenses of the indefensible on earth because religion offers the promise of that "pie in the sky by and by." Yet it could also be seen as capable of evoking a real protest against the real anguish caused by an unjust socio-economic order.

Concretely, Garaudy pointed to the Second Vatican Council as evidence that even the Catholic Church could undergo *metanoia,* and be prophetic within society instead of benignly imparting blessings on things as they are.

Garaudy thought that his distinction between religion as alienation and religion as protest could lead to two results: it could lead Christians to participate in "the revolutionary movement," and could blunt the general Christian charge that Marxism led to systematic atheism and hostility to religion. Both religion and Marxism were capable of *metanoia.*

Even more, each could learn from the other. Marxism could teach Christians how to translate into concrete strategies and structures their lofty vision of human dignity and human solidarity. It could also help Christians become more authentic by throwing the often pitiless glare of Marxist analysis upon the gap between Christian profession and performance.

And what can Marxism learn from Christianity? For Garaudy, Marxists needed Christianity to prevent their view of human life from being flattened into a one-dimensional universe. "Marxism would be the poorer," he wrote, "if St. Paul and St. Augustine, St. Theresa of Avila, Pascal and Claudel, and the Christian meaning of the transcendence of love were to become foreign to it."

These and similar statements by Garaudy proved too disturbing for those who held power in the French Communist Party. He was expelled, as mentioned earlier, in November, 1970, for "incorrect thinking," the Marxist equivalent of heresy. But, like some "heretics" in the history of the church—Aquinas, Galileo—he had helped open doors that could no longer be slammed shut and bolted by either rigidly dogmatic Marxists or Christians.

It is unfair to single out two or three figures among the Christian respondents in the European dialogue, even as it was unfair to have featured Roger Garaudy among the Marxist participants. One can only plead the necessity of selectivity in such a broad sketch as this, and apologize to those whose names or points of view have been omitted.

Karl Rahner had been writing about "the anonymous Christian" several years before the Christian-Marxist dialogue was more than a clearing of the throat on either side. As a consequence, he was able rather readily to absorb the "implicitly Christian" values of Marxism. Where Marxists show a genuine respect for truth, love and human solidarity, these values can be traced back to their ultimate source in Christ. Authentic Marxists could be anonymous Christians—to their surprise and, perhaps, anger at being thus drawn unwittingly and unwillingly into the camp of their ideological adversaries.

Giulio Girardi is an Italian theologian who had participated more extensively in the dialogue, and who had a more immediate knowledge of Marxism than did Rahner. He was, in a broad sense, a Catholic Garaudy, pointing to the gap between Marxist principle and practice, especially in Eastern Europe.

As Garaudy saw evidence of *metanoia* in the Second Vatican Council, Girardi saw the same possibility in the fact that Marxists could enter into dialogue with Christians. "There is a Marxism," he wrote, "that is open to dialogue, the Marxism of men. And there is a Marxism that is closed to dialogue, the Marxism of institutions. Our hope, and the hope of the world, is that in this dramatic tension between man and institution, the final victory will belong to man."

Girardi was a trusted member of the dialogue groups; his efforts were directed toward having Marxists themselves purge Marxism of the Stalinist legacy and present a human face to the hopes and aspirations of the world's people.

It was not mere rhetoric when Alexander Dubcek became first secretary of the Czech Communist Party. He began to talk about "Socialism with a human face," and his actions showed that he was concerned with a Marxism of persons, not *persona*, not merely a change of mask.

Girardi, Dubcek and thousands of like-minded, both Christian and Marxist, got their answer when tanks rumbled into Prague in August, 1968. The Marxism of

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institutions had forcibly prevailed over a Marxism of men.

Garaudy moved from a rigidly dogmatic Marxism to an undogmatic, rather amorphous Christianity. Girardi, as a Christian, had tried to summon Marxists to a purified version of Marxism drawn largely from the writings of the young Marx. Another response to Marxism had now begun to appear in the "theology of hope," a political theology largely associated with names of J.B. Metz and Jürgen Moltmann.

Metz saw in Marxism a challenge for Christians to abandon that emphasis on "life in the world to come" which had marked so much of Christianity for centuries. Far from staying aloof from the world, Christians must see it as an arena of struggle which summons them, as Christians, to a commitment to bring about change here and now.

"We are builders—not merely interpreters—of a future which has God for its dynamism," wrote Metz, in a statement recalling Marx's oft-quoted observation on Feuerbach: "The philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways. The point is not to interpret the world, but to change it."

A major instrument in God's shaping hand is the virtue of Christian hope, which had, too often in the past, been privatized and made an excuse for non-involvement in the affairs of a messy and naughty world. But Christian hope, like charity, is inclusive, and the church itself "the sacrament of hope for all mankind." Full entrance into the life of the *polis* is, then, not an option but an obligation for the Christian.

The *polis* must never be confused, however, with the Heavenly Jerusalem, which remains the horizon of human hope but lies always beyond purely human achievement. Christian hope not only impels toward political commitment but inspires political judgments. The hopeful Christian knows the difference between *liberté* and the perfect freedom of the children of God; between *égalité* and authentic solidarity. Thus the church becomes a constantly critical voice in whatever society it finds itself, capitalist or socialist of whatever variety.

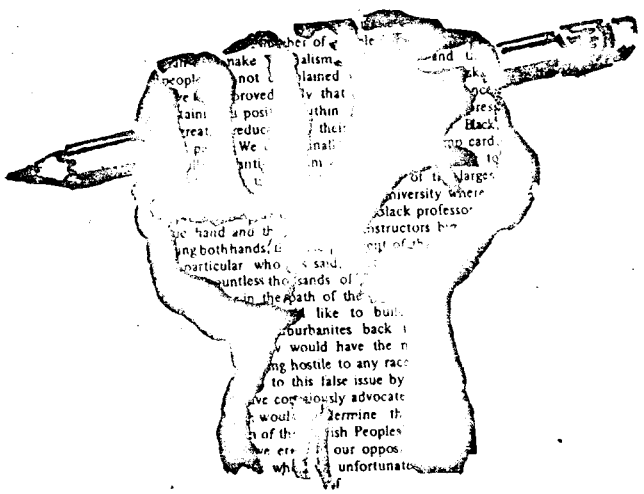
Broadly similar to the theology of hope developed by Metz is that of Jürgen Moltmann. Together they have emerged as two of Europe's most influential modern theologians precisely because of their insistence that the Scriptures must be proclaimed not only in the sanctuary but in the street.

But every street has two sides and a middle. The church, throughout much of its history in most parts of the world, had aligned itself, almost unthinkingly, with those on the fashionable side of the street, the holders of power who would resist any effort to diminish or destroy that power.

When pressed by a given historical circumstance to reflect upon its political role, the church most often moved to the middle of the street. It was to serve all; hence it was to be above the struggle, a neutral power able to effect reconciliation and love between contending parties.

While recognizing that in the past this mediating role of the church was occasionally proper and even effective, Moltmann feels that it is anachronistic now. "Today," he writes, "all ambiguous and abstract appeals for peace fall on deaf ears," and he cites as an example Pope Paul's address to the United Nations.

The church must not only proclaim and preach; it must act, and it must act on behalf of "the wretched of the earth." It must take its place on that teeming side of the street where more than half of the world's people



live in dehumanizing poverty. By thus concretely acting to help the oppressed achieve justice and freedom, by destroying the present barriers of class, race, education, the church will effect the true reconciliation of both oppressors and oppressed and thus truly become what it has rarely been—a church for all.

Christian hope, then, by looking toward the future and moving toward it, revolutionizes and transforms it. In a passage reminiscent of Augustine, Moltmann writes: "This is why faith, wherever it develops into hope, causes not rest, but unrest, not patience but impatience. It does not calm the heart, but is itself this unquiet heart in man. Those who hope in Christ can no longer put up with reality as it is, but begin to suffer under it, to contradict it. Peace with God means conflict with the world."

It is both interesting and significant that Metz and Moltmann were influenced in their theological thinking by Ernst Bloch, the East German Marxist philosopher. A non-practicing Jew, Bloch had two concerns of interest to theology.

The first was his conviction of transcendence. The human person is not finished and complete, but is always in process, moving beyond the present situation. This same concept of the human orientation toward the

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future, as we have seen in Metz and Moltmann, neither rescues nor absolves us from the present. The vision of what should be clarifies our perception of what is, and drives us to actions which will make the present the matrix of a more truly human future.

Second, Bloch thought he had discovered a kind of underground Bible, those many passages which ring out against those who oppress the poor and powerless. The Scriptures show, not the God of the philosophers, but the God of the *Magnificat*, who casts down the mighty from their seats and exalts the lowly.

Summing up these two emphases in Bloch, Moltmann described him as "a Marxist with a Bible in his hand, who hoped for greater things than socialism was able to give." However accurate that might be, the fact is beyond doubt: a non-practicing Jewish Marxist played a shaping role in the development of a Christian theology of hope.

Whatever interest the Christian-Marxist dialogue may have sparked in Europe (and it was never great), it had little resonance in Latin America precisely because it had little relevance. Europe is not Latin America, and Latin America was no longer importing European theology, as it had throughout its history.

Postwar Europe had been sundered into East and West, and these geographical divisions signified important political and economic divisions as well. The East was under Communist rule, and religion was practiced under severe restraints when permitted at all. The West, with the exception of Salazar's Portugal and Franco's Spain, was democratic and capitalistic. It had become increasingly secularized, and religious practice continually declined.

The situation in Latin America was markedly different. Ninety percent of its more than 300,000,000 population have been baptized, and Christianity, principally Roman Catholicism, remains a powerful political and cultural force.

Although most North Americans and Europeans tend to regard Latin America as a homogeneous blob, it is a continent of great diversity and startling contrasts. Argentina and Bolivia are adjoining nations, but they might as well be on separate continents. The population of Argentina is almost totally of European descent; that of Bolivia is 60 percent Indian and 35 percent of mixed blood. The per capita income of Argentina is eight times that of Bolivia. Argentina has an illiteracy rate of eight percent, while that of Bolivia is a crippling 85 percent. Similar disparities can be found in the neighboring nations of Chile and Peru.

It is also a continent which has been exploited by its more powerful neighbors. It was carved into colonies by European nations, principally Spain and Portugal. When independence was won through armed struggle in the nineteenth century, the new nations found themselves still economically dependent on the so-called developed world, principally the United States. Gunnar Myrdal has estimated, for example, that United States corporations, directly or indirectly, control or decisively influence between 70 and 90 percent of the raw materials of Latin America, and probably more than half of its industry, banking, commerce and foreign trade.

Out of this context of what they call economic colonialism, the theologians of Latin America have developed a political theology, not of hope, but of liberation. The word has an interesting, and important, history.

In the 1960s "development" was the word which seemed to hold the key which would unlock a better future for the have-not nations. President Kennedy launched the Alliance for Progress, the United Nations proclaimed a "development decade(s)," and *Populorum Progressio* spoke of "development as the new name for peace."

The problem was that, despite the insistence on development, nothing happened, or rather, that the developed nations continued to grow at the expense of the underdeveloped. Ten years after the launching of the Alliance for Progress, Senator Edward Kennedy stated the situations it had intended to ameliorate had only grown worse. The successive UNCTAD conferences (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) have made it quite clear that the "have" nations are not about to change patterns of trade in order to benefit the "have-nots."

For this reason, *Populorum Progressio*, despite its strength, seems also to have a major flaw: although preoccupied with the poor, it is addressed to rich nations and persons, and calls on them to solve the problems of poverty and injustice. History seems to show, however, that effective altruism—rare enough in individuals—is seldom found in nations or groups possessing wealth and power.

Against this background, the term "development" became a negative one for many Latin Americans, including many theologians. In 1969 Gustavo Gutierrez, a Catholic theologian from Peru, was asked to prepare a background paper on the theology of development for SODEPAX, the Committee on Society, Development and Peace, jointly constituted the year before by the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Committee on Justice and Peace. In that paper, Gutierrez pointed out that, in the concrete order, development had come to mean gradualism and reform—tinkering with the machinery which produced injustice, rather than dismantling it. Indeed, he suggested that development was an instrument for protecting the status quo, and expecting people to be grateful for it. A theology of development needed to be replaced by a theology of liberation.

That theology had been developing in Latin America for several years. It is significant that it did not originate in an academic setting, but in the discussions of the-

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ologians with "ordinary" people, including the poor in slum and countryside. Thus liberation theology grew out of dialogue, first with people whose lives were scarred by the realities of Latin America, then among the theologians themselves.

The theologians who are the architects of liberation had their advanced training in Europe, but found that this theology had little to say to the majority of Latin Americans, marginalized by structures of economic and social oppression. To paraphrase Gutierrez, in the North Atlantic nations, the evangelical question may be: How proclaim God to people who have abandoned Christianity—the non-believer? In Latin America, the question is: How proclaim God, the loving Father, to non-persons?

The key answer to that question, in the view of Gutierrez and others, was to reread the Scriptures through the prisms of the poor. What does the Bible, and therefore the church, have to say to those who live in squalor, hunger, illiteracy, whose lives are completely determined by the decisions of those at the top of the pyramid?

When thus read, the Scriptures reveal more than "the underground Bible" of Ernst Bloch. They show that justice is God's design for every member of his human family, and that the word and work of Jesus are centered about liberation.

Ironically, the very term, "liberation," has caused both confusion and consternation among many theologians in the United States, despite the fact that our own revolution was fought to achieve the inalienable rights of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Rather, then, than take a definition of liberation from theologians, I would prefer to take a definition shared by both the theologians and bishops of Latin America. It appears in the document on Justice issued by the Latin America Bishops' Conference (CELAM) at its meeting at Medellin, Colombia, in 1968:

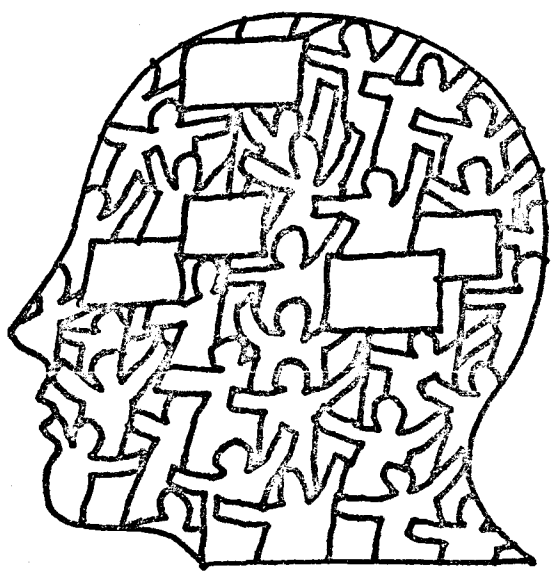
> The American Church has a message for all men on this continent who "hunger and thirst after justice." The very God who creates men in his image and likeness, creates the earth and all that is in it for the use of all men and all nations, in such a way that created goods can reach all in a more just manner, and gives them power to transform and perfect the world in solidarity. It is the same God who, in the fullness of time, sends his Son in the flesh, so that He might come to liberate all men from the slavery to which sin has subjected them: hunger, misery, oppression and ignorance, in a word, that injustice and hatred which have their origin in human selfishness.

It has frequently been observed that this meeting at Medellin was to the church in Latin America what Vatican II was to the church universal. Indeed, it might be considered an extension of the Council into the specific context of Latin America.

Without the Council's Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, for example, Medellin might well not have taken place. The preparation for the Conference was conciliar in mode. In the months before, a basic document was widely circulated to elicit opinions. At the meeting itself 150 bishops working with 100 *periti* elaborated a total of sixteen documents designed to give authoritative directions to the thought and action of the church in Latin America.

If Medellin were animated by Vatican II, it was also heavily influenced (some would say infiltrated) by theologians of liberation, many of whom were prominent among the *periti*.

In turn, the Latin American bishops, with many of the same *periti*, were to influence strongly the 1971



Synod of Bishops meeting in Rome to reflect on and respond to the question of "Justice in the World," a theme assigned to them by Pope Paul VI. It is all but impossible not to hear the language of Medellin and of the theologians of liberation in the following well-known (and controversial) statements of the Synod:

> Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.
>
> Education for justice demands a renewal of heart, a renewal based on the recognition of sin in its individual and social manifestations.

The above statements, and the entire synodal document on "Justice in the World," make it plain that certain basic thrusts of liberation as a political the-

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ology have now entered, not only into Catholic theology, but also into "the mind of the church." Interested Catholics everywhere have already begun to hear with increasing frequency such hitherto unfamiliar terms as "social sin," "sinful institutions," "orthodoxy and orthopraxis" (we shall be saved less by what we believe than what we do, and for the Christian, that is Christopraxis, as Frederick Herzog suggests), and "institutionalized violence."

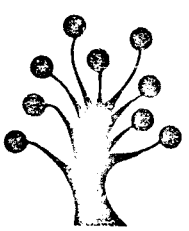
The Latin American theologians, both Catholic—Gutierrez, Segundo, Assman, Dussel *et al.*—and Protestant—Alves, Miguiez Bonino, Couch, *et al.*—have insisted on the contextualization of their theology. The theology of liberation has grown out of reflection on the context of Latin America, where life for the masses is limited by economic neocolonialism; the spread of military, usually repressive, regimes; the immense and growing gap between the wealthy elite and the poor within each nation of the continent who are so inhumanly poor precisely because the rich are so inhumanly rich.

The theologians, then, were offering, not a paradigm, but a perspective, even as the bishops at Medellin were speaking of *their* church, not *the* church. But good theology, or good pastoral reflection, will always be like a good work of artistic creation—capturing the universal within the tight net of the particular. Cardinal Suhard's "Decline or Fall?" was centered on the past, present and possible futures of the French church in the 1950s. Yet, like *Hamlet* or *Faustus*, it was translated into every major language precisely because it could not be contained within the net of particularity. Suhard spoke of problems confronting, not only the church in France or Western Europe, but the church everywhere. Like Cardinal Newman and Teilhard de Chardin, Cardinal Suhard was an unseen, uncounted, but very real participant in Vatican Council II.

Similarly, the theology of liberation and both the pastoral exhortations and pastoral practices of Latin America have set up resonances far beyond the situations they analyze and seek both to address and redress. Paradigm it was not, but perspective it is, not unlike the subject photographed by two or three different cameras from different angles or distances.

If the subject is oppression *vs.* the Christian imperative for liberation, then only the tint of the skin and relative weight of the shackles change.

Thus, when a conference was called in Detroit in 1975 to discuss "Theology in the Americas," it brought together Catholic and Protestant Latin American and



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North American theologians both black and white, female and male. But there were also many non-theologians, including Native Americans, Puerto Ricans and Chicanos, each "delegation" with a strong representation of women.

It was not a tidy, yawn-provoking assembly. The Latin Americans were told that even their theology of liberation has something of an elitist ring; it tended to neglect the oppression of women and natives in Latin America. Further, much of their analysis of oppression did not apply to the situations of blacks, women and Hispanics in North America. Each of these groups must work out liberation within its own context, and had begun to do so.

The same tension between universality and particularity was shown at another conference held in 1976 at Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. This brought together twenty-two theologians from Africa, Asia and Latin America. For them, the principal theological *locus* is the fact that the modern world is divided into rich and poor, among nations and within nations. What should be the response of Christians to this phenomenon, both as participants in history and as followers of Christ?

It was the first time theologians had come together ecumenically from these three continents heavy with oppression. They thus came together, as they expressed it, "from the other side of the earth and the underside of history." What emerged from Dar es Salaam, as from Detroit, was a consensus that liberation was the necessary theme of theology, but each must work out that theology in its own setting. The theology of liberation must be indigenized, not homogenized.

Indeed, distinct but related theologies of liberation are already being developed in Africa (including South Africa) South Korea, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. (Gustavo Gutierrez's *A Theology of Liberation* is the most widely read theological book of the decade among Filipinos.)

It is not surprising that Latin American liberation theology, speaking for the oppressed, should have a creative resonance in the Third World. But it has also spoken to the First World, in the judgment of North American theologians such as Harvey Cox, Robert McAfee Brown, John Coleman, Frederick Herzog, Gregory Baum and John Bennett, among others. Bennett writes:

> Liberation theology is important for us in the U.S. because it is in part addressed to us . . . as the dominating power in the Western hemisphere, the great power by which these theologians see their countries exploited, or on which they feel an unwelcome dependence.

While fully sharing Dr. Bennett's view, I think liberation theology has addressed itself to, and been at least partially heard by, the churches of Europe and North America, the "dominant churches," as Third World theologians term them. As suggested above, certain themes of liberation theology have entered into the thinking of the Christian Church, particularly those which center about the Exodus-event and the Christ-event. If we try to discern "the signs of the times" in the light of these events, we are drawn to the conclusion that the Christian Church must be pastorally identified with the poor everywhere, and be no longer a mere teacher of justice, but a witness to justice.

Thus, there is a political theology (and I would say largely that of liberation theology) in the following developments, selected from among many.

The last General Congregation of the Jesuits (1974-75) called on its members "under the banner of the cross to commit themselves to the crucial struggle for the faith, and the struggle for justice which the faith demands."

Many other religious orders and congregations have given similar priority to the struggle for justice. These commitments converged at the Third Inter-American Meeting of Religious in Montreal, November, 1977, representing 300,000 men and women of religious congregations in the Western Hemisphere.

The theme was an invitation to abstraction, collective introspection or evasive speculation: "The Future of Religious Life That We are Building Together." As developed by the meeting, however, the theme took on a threatening concreteness. The key to the future of religious life was seen to be poverty—both a more authentic living of the vow of poverty and service and solidarity with the involuntarily poor.

The "Bishops' Call to Action" meeting in October, 1976, was, it will be recalled, the culmination of the official Roman Catholic observance of the American Bicentennial under the rubric of "Liberty and Justice for All." Many of the resolutions debated at Detroit were of controversial nature, and therefore seized the center of media attention, both secular and religious. Almost ignored were the theological reflections which preceded each of the major topics around which the Bicentennial process had focused: Church, Ethnicity and Race, Nationhood, Humankind, etc.

Although written by different theologians working independently of each other, these reflections are a surprisingly consistent presentation of political theology—indigenously American. They deserve serious study as theological texts, quite apart from the resolutions and recommended actions which they preface, and are readily available in "A Call to Action," issued by the United States Catholic Conference.

Another major presentation of political theology is the pastoral letter of the Catholic bishops of Appalachia, "This Land is Home to Me." It is a remarkable ecclesial document, as much for its easy intelligibility as for its content. The powerlessness of the poor in Appalachia, the letter argues, is due to a systemic evil,

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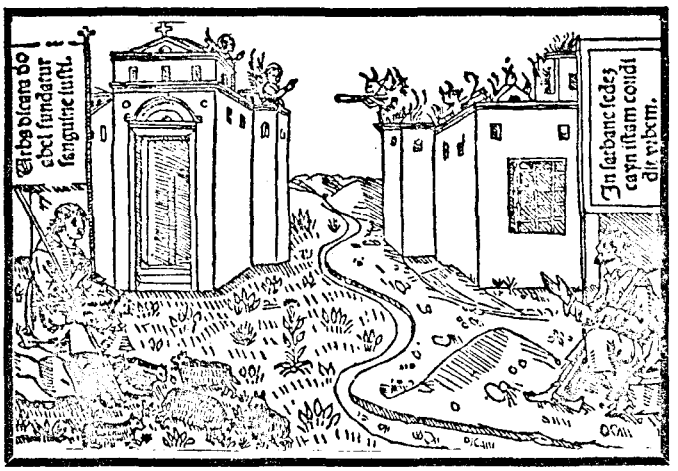
and the roots of that evil are to be found in the factors which determine the decisions of the major businesses which dominate the region: technological rationalization and maximization of profits. Could it also be, as the bishops suggest, that these same factors account for the poverty and powerlessness of that vast Appalachia which we call the Third World?

The development of a contemporary politicized Christianity does not, of course, exhaust the richness of the Christian message. Not all pastoral ministry, for example, can or should be politically oriented, nor should all prayer. If, however, in the words of the 1971 Synod, *"action* (emphasis added) on behalf of justice is a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel," then it becomes clear that a totally a-political Christianity is a caricature, and that to proclaim a purely privatized Gospel is to proclaim a Gospel which is truncated and, indeed, blasphemous.



The life of the 'counsels' of perfection

PILGRIMS IN A STRANGE WORLD

DAVID S. TOOLAN

We asked for it and got it. Not Toyota, but a pilgrim church. Had St. Augustine been present at Vatican II, he might have forewarned us with an ironic smile. The irony lies in the fact that he loathed traveling, even while self-consciously choosing the image of a long highway, an *iter*, and the wayfarer, a *peregrinator*, as expressions for the quality of mature Christian existence. For despite moments of vision like those in the garden at Cassiciacum and at Ostia—like ours perhaps after Vatican II—he found himself returned to a life of protracted labor, conflict, and the infinite postponement of his deepest wishes. As is clear from his autobiography, he fought a constant battle against regarding human kind as utterly hopeless, fully cognizant that from his standpoint, despair would have been the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit.

That new kind of maturity, a spiritual leap, which Vatican II signaled and to which the council called us, represented, we now realize, a calculated risk which inevitably exacts a price. Many were caught unprepared, and one of the ambiguous strength-weaknesses of the Catholic tradition, epitomized in Dostoyevski's Grand Inquisitor parable, is solicitude for the unready. Obviously, though, that solicitude can be pushed too far, so that it stifles the Spirit and betrays the future. As Bonhoeffer reminded us, there is no cheap grace. From what we can tell by the Gospel narratives, Jesus's audiences were no less unprepared; yet he came, ready or not.

The editor has asked me to review new frontiers in one sector of this pilgrim church, that of religious life, the life of the so-called "counsels" of perfection which, again after Vatican II, we recognize as no longer applying exclusively to a specialized caste but to every Christian. Theoretically, then, the council blurred the boundaries between layperson and religious, and sociologically, if we take the disappearance of distinctive clerical garb as symbol, we can assume that psychologically the hierarchical two-class division among Christians is vanishing as well.

The turn-about represents both gain and loss. On the one hand, decloistering, for all the identity-crisis it has provoked among religious and perhaps because of this very unmooring from traditional anchors, has probably been the principal stimulus behind the movement to recover our contemplative roots and our intellectual-critical role in church and society, both of which lie at the heart of what religious life should have to contribute to the wider community. At the same time, this secularization of religious life has brought us closer to the people and the problem of modern society. "Never," says James Hillman, "was the minister more truly one with his flock than when the lostness of the sheep is

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equaled by that of the shepherd." Hillman takes this positively insofar as the soul-turmoil of "lostness" can beget a search for that inner, vertical pivot without which all words are clichés, all doing insubstantial, that is, insofar as disorientation compels development along the contemplative axis of selfhood.

On the other hand, a lost shepherd is not much help until he reorients himself. And before that event, the elimination of cloister walls may spell a lethal leveling into the mass of philistine modern life, or just as bad, the individualistic career politics of academe and industry. Perfectly socialized and adjusted to ordinary secular life, to the status quo, religious life has lost all entitlement to its own meaning as a deliberate enactment of Christ's "sign of contradiction." There was nothing more undermining of the *raison d'être* of religious life than the heady post-Vatican II enthusiasm for the wonders of the secular city—for why renounce all that if it's so good? Fortunately, as is the inscrutable way with the Lord of history, events came to our aid—experiences of the ghetto, Vietnam, Watergate, Chile.

Extraordinary Lives

Though I am not competent to do so, it is clear the history and social function of religious orders needs to be recast and reunderstood in fresh ways. So much of the story has been told in terms of the lives of extraordinary individuals, and surely there is a largely unexamined link between what makes saints tick and the historical rise of individualism in the West and the value we place upon it. There are also links between ascetical detachment and the modern scientific posture of disinterested knowledge. But surely now we need less hagiography, and more socio-political and psychological analysis of how these figures and their movements dissented from and in strange ways blessed their times, and were often co-opted by the powers that be.

No one, I think, will argue today for a return to the exaggerated contempt for "the world" which we have known in the past; on the other hand, we do need to reunderstand the abiding social function of the otherworldliness that has always constituted the power-base of religious life to quite literally move men and women to dare great things—albeit some doubtful great things like St. Bernard's "preaching" the crusades. (I am not recommending any false harmonistic efforts, much less a whitewash.) I mean that no one, after Freud, will be naive about the dangers of a crippling transference-relation veiled in the vow of obedience. On the other hand, when seen in historical context, for some the vows of obedience and poverty represented a way of transcending and criticizing a conventional loyalty to status quo power arrangements and the reification of people in servitude to an unjust economic system—holding out for and trying to exemplify a quality of relationship and communal equity undreamt of by either oppressed victims or their masters.

Politics, after all, is the science of the possible—and at least occasionally monks, nuns and mendicants could respond to cynical realists that they had actually pulled off a real alternative, and thus held a mortgage on the future direction of political and economic organization. Except, as is all too clear, the very utopias which monasteries established were built on surpluses provided by that disordered order they implicitly criticized, just as it might be said that without the particular system in which they worked the activist orders would have had far fewer needy, poor and oppressed to minister to. To be sure, the activists cared for soul problems which no social system can remedy, but we also did a lot of dirty work for the system, caring for those maimed and broken by it—without, till lately, seeking out the social source and causes. Before the living God, as Job found out, no man can claim innocence; today, we have a further slant on the pretense that any of us have clean hands: by the very fact that none of us, by living in society, can escape the institutional sins of our fathers.

For all that, a clear "No" in service to a "Yes" to a future alternative is all the more demanded. This is equally true for the virtue of chastity (the capacity to honor, committedly, the face of God in another), less clear today in the matter of celibacy, with which the vow of chastity is often confused. Again, in historical context, chastity and celibacy can be seen as dissents from the dominant styles of Roman and feudal culture which treated women as chattels, and procreation as a way of building a personal dynasty. In those contexts, celibacy might well be realized as liberation for a more complete and humane eroticism.

The introduction of romantic love *within* marriage, however, a thing unheard of before the troubadors first popularized the notion (at that, outside marriage initially), changes things—or does it? The question for religious at this point is whether the program implicit in their renunciation of genital sex has now been achieved. An answer to this question will depend on what one makes of the current sexual liberation in its saner and serious forms. Is it a spurious liberation, itself a symptom of the malaise of a post-industrial, computer society? Does it enthrone the genitals as the last hold-out of freedom when the rest of the body has been totally de-eroticized, made thing-like in the service of commercial rationality and productivity? And is that freedom as illusory as our freedom to buy at the supermarket—after we have sold our souls and bodies to the system?

I am thinking here, of course, of Herbert Marcuse's and Norman O. Brown's argument—and against them, those in the tradition of Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*, for whom sexual repression and sublimation is the price we pay for keeping Hobbes's wolf in

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us at bay. I suspect the debate between these adversaries could use a mediating third alternative as yet missing, but there is no question in my mind but that if we intend to find the "Yes" contained in our "No," this is the right conversation to get involved in.

At the moment, lacking any clear perception of what our resistance in the sexual sphere is really about *today*, in this context, it is little wonder that the supposed sign-value of celibacy registers on very few if any (of the young especially), and that new entrants assume it half-heartedly, consciously willing to be this way for reasons of the head. Yet an examination of the texts of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross will tell you right away that they knew a kind of eroticism which most of us can only fantasize. This was not the repressed life. The question is, what would such a mystical eroticism look like in our actual setting, and is it really practicable without sharpening immeasurably our critical appraisal of those structural alliances between business, government, the media and education which determine that it shall remain a pipe dream? Augustine was wise enough to understand that the reason his people were not great lovers was not due to bad will, but to a deformation in what we would today call the subconscious—only today we need to understand, as Augustine did not, more exactly how the uncivil socio-economic order of things distorts our psyches beyond the reach of normal consciousness—at a depth which little short of a mystical experience can heal.

But let me now retrace my steps and try to recast the meaning of the vowed life in a way that I hope will clarify the thoughts I have just now so loosely strung together. In the remainder of this essay I propose to explore the worldly significance of that other-worldliness of religious life that I have called its "power base." I hope this will illuminate the contemplative activity which lies at the center of the thing since its inception with those crazy individuals who first ventured into the vast silences of Sinai to "see" God face to face as Moses had. If religious orders have a distinctive function within the larger church and society, it is finally this: to know first hand the passage between this world and that "other" beyond the imagining of ordinary consciousness, and to give away the secret freely. If the secularizing trend creates in us an exigency for this "seeing," then we may be on our way to redeeming the calculated risk of Vatican II; but if it means a lowering of that aspiration or a contraction of spirit to the pathology of everydayness, the gamble won't have been worth the price. I will try, then, in what follows to throw light on my subject by casting it in the frame of a *rite of passage*, of which pilgrimages are one type. Religious life as a specialized mode of being is important for the secular world, I shall argue, precisely because it attempts either to renew the significance of humdrum ordinary life from sex to eating to work, or to imagine and embody a new creation when the social order becomes deadly.

A rite of passage represents a structured way of redefining and integrating the potential individual and social disorientation and anomie that invariably accompanies a transit from one mode of being in the world to another higher mode of being. It maps out an "anti-structure" in contrast to normally structured social involvements wherein the process of death-rebirth or self-transcendence can occur under optimal conditions. In other words, it briefs us for a descent into our personal hell (what the monks called the "purgative" way), prepares us for a here and now ascent to heaven and the renewal of our cosmic connection (what ascetics spoke of as "illumination" and the "unitive" way), and finally, in traditional societies at least, reintegrates the individual into society at a new psychic and social level.

Whether an initiatory rite that qualifies a child to join the adult world or the more lengthy and arduous pilgrimage characteristic of and in tension with complex feudal systems, such anti-structural passages embody three phases, one of *separation* from normal structured social existence, a *transitional* or "*liminal*" phase in which the actor undergoes a symbolic rebirth, and finally a return to and *reincorporation* into society with new responsibilities there. The terminology and analysis here is drawn from anthropologist Victor Turner, who in turn has drawn upon and expanded the earlier work of Arnold van Geenep. For my purposes here, it is Turner's proposition that religious orders represent examples of an attempt to institute a state of "permanent liminality" within and yet somehow outside of the norms and routines of society that throws fresh light on the creative, and not merely legitimating, function that contemplatives have had in the past and may yet have.

For Turner sees at all levels of history and society a tension, a kind of polar magnetic field, between those

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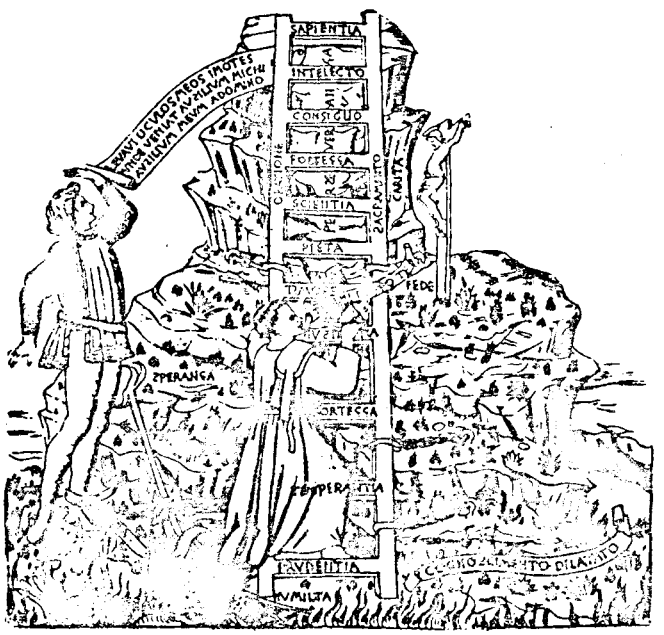
utilitarian objectives of a society which hold people apart, define difference in terms of occupational status and role, constrain action, *and* what he calls *communitas*, the anti-structural desire for an equalitarian, immediate and existential relationship among people which nullifies all the normal classifications upon which the social order depends. In liminality, however, it is precisely this ethos of *communitas* which tends to characterize the relationship between those jointly experiencing the ritual transition. Further, as Turner is at pains to point out, the total unmediated relationship at stake here does not submerge one into another but safeguards each's uniqueness. While putting all socially structured rules in question and suggesting new possibilities for how we "get together," it is not to be confused with Durkheim's "mechanical solidarity."

I believe this clarifies the true purport of terms such as withdrawal, detachment, and disinterest in the mystical lexicon of vowed religious. It does not mean withdrawal from humanity but from the normal structure that divides people from each other. What in fact is being renounced by the three vows is the absolutist tyranny of normal social differentiations over the determination of human identity and worth ("without my job, I am nobody"). Religious life attempts at one and the same time to link the roles of the workaday world to their paradigm in the divine creativity (thus giving the ordinary cosmic significance), and establish an identity for the human person not constructed on social status and role, or that whole network of games we learn to play to win self-esteem from the powers of this world.

In other words, it intends to create real individuals who stand on something other than social approval. What is equally clear, however, is that this Other-based identity and the *communitas* that flows from it will be a dead letter without those transformative experiences which have usually been designated as mystical. Cultural and social barriers between us only really come down when, together, we quite literally step "out of this world" where they rule the day. And without this kind of experience, it is understandable our internal governance compares (favorably?) to General Motors, and "community" degenerates into the camaraderie of a men's or a bridge club. For something else, a shared contemplative *experience* is indispensable.

And when does a society most need this mystical inward turn? History tells us mystical movements occur at junctures when the public order's conventions, projects and rituals become petrified, a frustration rather than a help in the promotion of truly human interests and creative energy—in the late Roman empire, in the waning middle ages, during the 17th century. And if the '60s and early '70s are any clue, ours too is one of those times, a liminal period between relatively stable social relations and cultural values. This underscores, I think, the contemporary relevance of the contemplative life as a radical effort to recover both spirit and imagination for new alternatives to the traps of business-as-usual.

Then why haven't the young been knocking down our doors? Because among other reasons the orders are to such a great extent locked into serving those institutions, political and economic, which are perceived as choosing death rather than life—the very institutional set-up which induces the dis-eases and pathologies which increasing numbers of psychologists find they are impotent to cure. It is just this latter phenomenon that is creating a whole new field in psychological research, that of Transpersonal Psychology, which is little else than a raid on the mystical tradition's secret therapy. What is so far largely missing in the latter, however, and which one might expect communitarian religious



to realize, is the implicit social critique that needs to accompany any psychological approach to contemporary problems—that, and the necessity of developing a counter-culture, an alternative institutional arrangement that grows out of a *shared* vision. As far as I can see, that's what monasteries were about. It was Ernest Becker who first made it clear to me: the principle that when a social system begins to lose credit as a medium for the heroics all of us crave, the church supporting that system will also be discredited. It follows, he said, that if the church insists on it own vision, she must in part work against the dominant culture, recruiting to an anti-heroics.

But no second-hand, hearsay vision will suffice. One wants the real thing. Nor is George Eliot's "belief in belief" sufficient. We want strong, primitive stuff here, and the kind of thirst for it that drove Graham Greene to Africa in order to take himself out of the anemia of British culture. There is no room for pentecostal highs

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that leave the demons in us intact. Nor can we afford to lament the passing of the "old church." Let her go. The fear we feel is part of the ritual process, a necessary part, including the grief over loss of old ways and the terror of the unknown and undefined world we must enter. The first phase of the ritual is the community formed from sharing a common adversity. The Hebrews knew something of that—and know it still. It isn't the promised land, but it keeps you moving.

The temptation to stop or turn back spells death. Creative forces are that way, like Shiva-the-Destroyer in Hindu myth. Liminal periods summon us forth to a radical redefinition of our self-understanding, and as any shaman knows, this phase of the process is dangerous. There is enormous energy breaking ground, which if it does not find outlet in creative channels, can easily turn destructive. It is precisely at this point, however, when we've consented to let go of our old selves and face the unknown and descending dark, St. John of the Cross reminds us, that real faith begins in earnest. Sooner or later, we must put to ourselves the question one of the original desert rats, St. John Climacus, put to himself: "What is this mystery in me? What is the meaning of this blending of body and soul? How am I constituted a friend and a foe to myself? Tell me, tell me, my yokefellow, my nature, for I shall not ask anyone else in order to learn about you."

This is the quest for one's "naked being," the journey to discover who one really is outside all structure. Obviously it's an anti-heroics, and no one will undertake it who buys into the ruling paradigms of "scientific" reality. Yes, and you do have to be crazy, a fool, by conventional standards. Let's be clear on that score —but let's also be clear that this plunge into liminal space and time is not to be recommended for those of weak ego. This madness requires extraordinary stability and courage—and I have spoken to any number of sensible folk who had the opportunity and refused.

Sad too. Many refuse because they've never actually met anyone who's "gone over" and come back to tell the story of the enhanced existence he or she found there. But this is exactly the trip that, according to my argument, religious are called upon to map out and lead others to. For this is the stage of the ritual in which our arsenal of consciousness-raising devices come into play—fasting, rhythmic dancing and chanting, trance induction, dream interpretation, social isolation, hyperactivity, sleep deprivation, physical yoga and various forms of meditation. Not that these techniques *cause* what a person experiences. They rather set up conditions to reduce those psychic defenses that seal off "common sense" from the experience of the supernatural. They are ways of deconditioning ourselves

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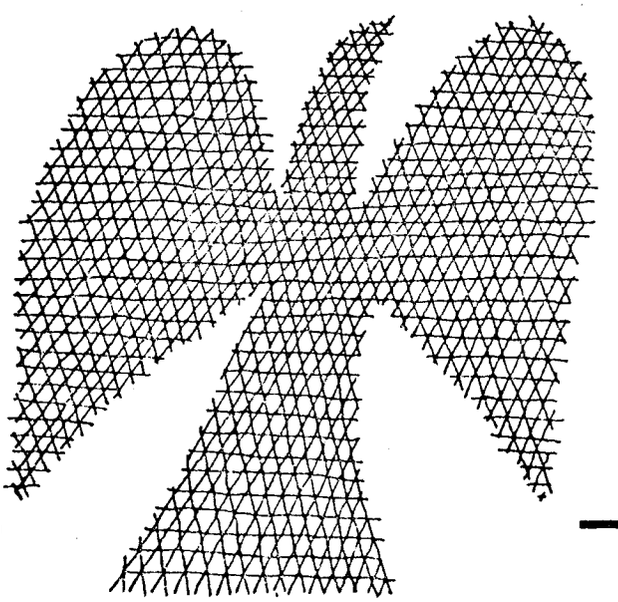

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from those habits of a lifetime that keep us small and contracted, ways of re-disposing the self for the advent of God's grace. Unfortunately, through formalistic misuse, many of us have forgotten or never knew how to use these methods well, or what they really meant. In part for this reason, the Gospel is unlived, or spoken halfheartedly. We have not felt what we mean to God, so how can we really mean him to others? Or how can we heal if we have not ourselves been healed? Or how awake others when we ourselves sleep?

This is crucial. After inducting his despairing people into an actual experience of his great vision, Black Elk of the Dakota Sioux tells us simply that they were "madeover," that they were "able to see the greenness of the world, the wideness of the sacred day, and the colors of the earth." In parallel, think of those primal, healing words in the Gospel—"I will not forget you," "No," "Yes," "take heart," "follow me," "stand up and walk," and God's unspeakable name itself, "I AM." As a religious, it is not enough for me to mouth them, let alone simply glorify another who could say them and mean it to such extent that all these simple words were like the primordial fiat spoken at the creation. If I get it right, the idea is that what was first spoken by God might eventually be spoken by humans, that in some germinal, cross-purposed way, *we* are the face of God in the world, and may yet speak with his voice. Listen to that liminal being, Meister Eckhart. Isn't this what he's saying to us?

> A master says, God has become man: through this all mankind is raised and exalted. Let us rejoice that Christ our brother has ascended . . . This master has spoken well, but in truth, I do not set great store by it. What would it avail me if I had a brother who was a rich man, and for my part I were a poor man? What would it avail me if I had a brother who was a wise man, and I were a fool?

Yes, it will profit little if we celebrate Christ the King while we are still serfs; any way you cut it, it's borrowed luster—and the grandeur does not belong to us. Symbolically, we did away with that conception with the depositions of Charles I and Louis XVI. We are democrats; we want a part in the action. But Eckhart continues.

> The Heavenly Father brings forth his only-begotten Son in himself and *in me*. Why in Himself and in me? I am one with Him, and He cannot shut me out. In the same act the Holy Ghost receives its being, and it arises through me as it does through God. Why? I am in God, and if the Holy Ghost does not take its being from me it does not take it from the Father either. I am not shut out in any way.

"I am not shut out in any way." I suppose the problem goes the other way, that it is I, with my narrow conception of myself, or that tightly held ego of mine that fits so well into the slots of conventional life—it is I myself who does the shutting out. Precisely. That's why ego is not enthroned in the literature of liminality, nor is the personality. And that is why, properly understood, ascetical disciplines work at baffling the rational mind's filter system, work at softening body-armor, work at emptying and opening the breathing. We are too full of ourselves and all the rackety sensory overload of modern life—and have no space, no hearing for God and what he would speak and do through us. If our Jonah Syndrome, our resistance to greatness, to love, were not so fierce. And yet the resistance is understandable. Do many go willingly to death, lay down their lives freely? For in saying the liminal phase entails a "symbolic death-rebirth," we must not kid ourselves that this is like "playing dead" in a stage play. No, of course there are degrees of intensity, but the ego-death involved here should feel exactly like biological death, a crunching severance, a total abandonment into the encompassing darkness. It cheapens the greatness of the courage here if anticipation of a happy ending glosses over the reality of a symbolic shift of this dimension.

But people do return from this experience, and greatly enhanced in stature, often enough really cherishing and loving the earth and all living creatures for their own sakes for what seems like the first time. Seeing really, behind the facades, the true faces of others, anguished and perhaps weeping now in an entirely different way that these beautiful, fragile beings so easily forget themselves. And seeing too that there's a new work to be done, one that would never have occurred to them before. They have recovered a new way of imagining the world, and hence a different project. One thinks of Malcolm X returning from his pilgrimage to Mecca. "What I have seen and experienced," he said, "has forced me to rearrange much of my thought patterns . . . and to toss aside some of my previous conclusions . . . We were truly all the same, brothers. . . ." He came back transformed, but we didn't know what to do with him, couldn't fit him into the categories we were used to. He had to die. The story sounds vaguely familiar.

"Foolish people," says Eckhart, "deem that they should look upon God as though he stood there and they here. It is not thus." No, from within there's this amazing truth in us waiting to be born. Others can surely touch it, evoke its movement—but I think, finally, what really awakens this truth lies beyond this world, beyond the mind of man to imagine. Once you've seen that, even a piece of it, life is never quite the same. You can never forget—and remembering it is like remembering yourself, your real self. You remember that time out of time when you caught your own true face, your own true voice, revealing some of the glory of God. The world needs that.

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The links between poetic and theological language

THEOLOGY'S ENCOUNTER WITH LITERATURE

SALLIE McFAGUE

One hears cries from many corners these days that theology is dead, that the great theologians have passed and no new ones have taken their places, that theological reflection is at best "occasional" and at worst, chaotic. Similar Cassandra-like prophecies on the death of the novel have not proven true; rather, what we have learned to appreciate is new forms of the novel, forms more suited to our contemporary sensibility than the linear, individualistic search-for-identity of the "classic" 19th century novel. There is strong evidence, I believe, for similar appreciative openness to the possibilities within present-day theology.

And, significantly, for our topic at hand, literature is playing an important role in the current scene. Such was not always the case. In fact, throughout the history of theology and until recently, literature and the other arts were viewed by Christianity with suspicion. Plato's distrust of the poet, combined with an Hebraic fear of idolatrous images and an interpretation of the New Testament as "otherworldly," combined to create a situation inimical to the arts. The church has always been happy to use the arts for didactic purposes, as the stone murals on Gothic cathedrals and contemporary Sunday School literature amply illustrate. Even the 20th century resurgence of theological interest in the arts, epitomized in Paul Tillich's existential analysis of serious art as revelatory of ultimate concern, tended more towards its apologetic usefulness (however subtly the apology was framed) than towards the encounter of theology with the intrinsic nature and independence of art forms.

A significant change in this encounter occurred with the work of Amos Wilder, especially his *Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel*. In this book which appeared in 1964 (and which has since become a classic), Wilder shows not only that the New Testament is composed of various literary genres (story, parable, poem, prayer, sermon) but he insists on the unsubstitutability of each of these

SALLIE MC FAGUE *is Dean of the Divinity School of Vanderbilt University in Nashville and the author of* Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology (*Fortress*).

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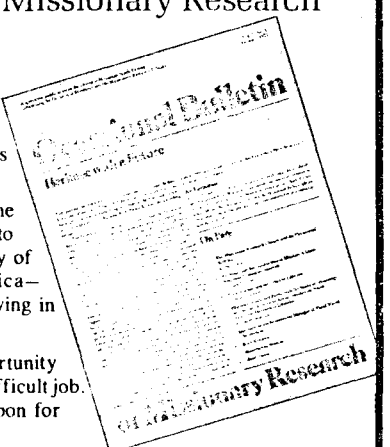

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forms. What should have been evident about the nature of the primary religious language of Christianity—that like all such language it is poetic—has shifted the focus of the encounter between theology and literature from a didactic concern with "content" (whether this be understood as illustrating doctrines or manifesting "ultimate concern") to an appreciative interest in "form"—the genres of religious language as well as the symbolic nature of such language.

This shift has meant, among other things, that theologians nowadays are less interested in analyzing novels and plays to discover possible "God-talk" implicit in them than in learning from literature and literary critics the intrinsic connections between poetic and theological language. If primary religious language *is* poetic and if, as Paul Ricoeur and others have shown, "the symbol gives rise to thought"; that is, if poetic and conceptual language are on a continuum, *then*, retracing the way poetic language eventuates in conceptual language becomes a crucial hermeneutical task. Such a task does not mean that systematic is a substitute for poetic language nor that poetic can dispense with conceptual language; rather, each type of language is legitimate and necessary. Ricoeur insists that the critical thinker must return with a "second naiveté" to the symbolic base of conceptuality for its fuel and fire. Likewise, Wilder has said recently that "literature cannot take the place of hard, systematic discursive theology, despite the defective theology of our time. Although story-telling and parables are fundamental to theology, we cannot turn to these alone. Religion is not only of the psyche, but is of the social order."[1]

From Wilder's basic insights there has emerged in the last twelve years a plethora of books and articles on parable and metaphor, autobiography and story, symbol and myth, all of which are intent on pursuing the disclosive power of these basic genres and of religious language.[2] In other words, the intent is hermeneutical not apologetic: poetics and poetic forms are *intrinsic* to the theological task, not prolegomena to it. Suspicion and didacticism have turned into appreciation of the foundational character of poetics for theological reflection.

A caveat should be inserted at this point since the *way* one sees "the state of a field," in this case the encounter of theology with literature, is largely determined by the idiosyncratic perspective of the viewer. It is impossible for me, given my own excitement and involvement with the directions which this encounter has take in the last decade, not to focus on it as a genuinely important development. However, it must be said that what I have briefly outlined is not by any means *all* that is going on between theology and literature. Anyone who follows the book reviews in journals knows that not only is the old didacticism very much alive as well as more subtle forms of apologetic interest in the arts, but thematic criticism of religious motifs in contemporary literature is also, and much

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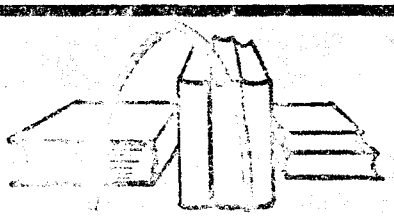
of it is extremely sophisticated and well-done.[3] My focus is not meant to disparage other approaches; rather, I hope only to show one direction in the encounter between literature and theology which I believe to be especially significant for *theology*.

Having admitted to partiality, I would like now to concentrate on the assets and liabilities of the type of encounter I favor. I would like first to speak of the current theological scene and the part literary motifs and genres play in the new form theology is taking. I will then comment on a particular positive contribution which the analysis of such genres and motifs can make to theology as well as on a major limitation of such analysis.

The context of the current theological situation, as I see it, is a growing appreciation for what David Tracy calls "a responsible pluralism" in theology. It is a recognition in part of the variety of genuine theological styles and interests on the contemporary scene—a recognition that there are no one or two dominant systematic positions as in the days of Tillich and Barth. Tracy has analyzed the context in a variety of publications and its distinctive character is a call for public and cooperative discussion among different theological positions.[4] While his terminology varies somewhat in his writings, three main groups emerge: the academic or fundamental theologians; the hermeneutical, church, or systematic theologians; and the praxis-oriented, liberation theologians. It is not necessary or appropriate here to delineate the functions and concerns of each group; what is critical for our concerns are two points.

First, the description of the middle group—the hermeneutical theologians—is such as to require of them radical dependence on poetics. The role of the hermeneutical theologians, says Tracy, is "to determine the disclosive or illuminating power of the Christian symbol system . . . to rearticulate, to reconfess, to render publicly available again the still disclosive classical expressions of the Christian spirit."[5] Determining the disclosive power of symbols, of course, necessarily involves the theologian in acquaintance with the peculiarities of primary religious language (its metaphors, symbols and images) as well as the genres in which this language occurs in religious texts (prayers, poetry, parables, autobiographies, stories).

Now, traditionally, systematic theologians have depended upon philosophy as their "disciplinary partner"; Tracy, on the contrary, is suggesting that while philosophical tools are still necessary to the hermeneutical, church theologian (though the dependence is less than in the case of the academic, fundamental theologian), what is of equal importance is hermeneutical skills to deal with the central primary religious language both in its traditional and contemporary forms. Such a theologian stands within a symbolic tradition and illuminates the disclosive power of these symbols. The relations with art are intrinsic and unavoidable. Says Tracy, "religion, like art, dis-



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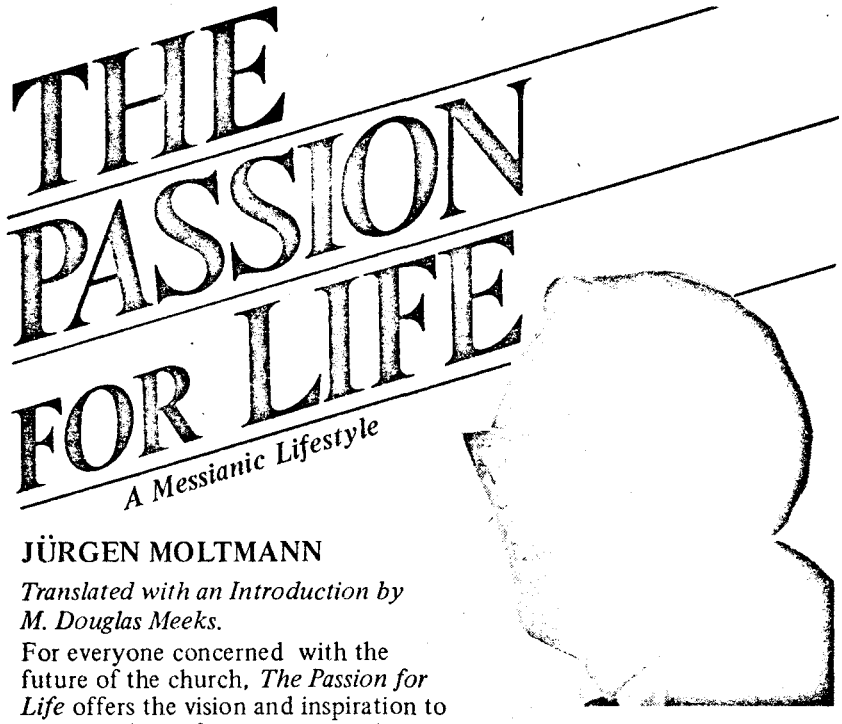
closes human meanings and truths to anyone willing to risk allowing that disclosure to 'happen' by faithful attendance to (and thereby in involvement in and interpretation of) that truth-disclosure of genuinely *new* possibilities for human life in a tradition of taste, tact and genuinely common (as communal) sense."[6]

Poetics, then, is central to theology. This revolutionary insight has a second implication. Tracy is suggesting, not a hierarchy of theological reflection in which a "primitive" symbolic religious language is absorbed and surpassed by conceptual language—a hierarchy with parables and stories at the bottom and systematic, philosophical theology at the top—but a pattern of mutual dependence and appreciation among different types of theological reflection. In such a pattern, fundamental, hermeneutical, and praxis theologians complement and depend on one another, use the insights and work of each other, compensate for their own partialities and limitations by the work of others. While Tracy does not say so explicitly, what I see emerging from his analysis of the contemporary theological sense and its possibilities is "colleagueship" in theology of a fairly high order. Gone are the days of the theologian as prima donna, the days of the "total theologian"; let us welcome the era of "responsible pluralism" in theology where many work at different tasks with a high sense of public accountability and with appreciation for different perspectives and tasks not one's own. To the extent that this is a viable description of tendencies on the theological scene and not a mere utopian wish for "the communion of theologians," it is a hopeful counter to the prophecy that theology is dead.

Assuming that this pattern is a credible analysis of possibilities within the contemporary theological scene, what is the *special* contribution to it of heremeneutical theologians, those working to illuminate the disclosive power of the Christian symbolic tradition? The contributions here are, needless to say, many and varied. New Testament scholars such as Amos Wilder, Robert Funk, Dan Via, Dominic Crossan, William Beardslee, Norman Perrin (as well as philosopher Paul Ricoeur) have made immense contributions to the enterprise of hermeneutical theology in their work on parables as metaphors, genre criticism of the New Testament, their insistence on the extravagance of biblical language as it moves hearers into "limit situations." Literary critics ananlyzing the rebirth, distortion and reformulation of Christian symbols in the novels of Flannery O'Connor, Melville, Dostoevsky, Walker Percy as well as the alienation from traditional symbols in the work of Camus, Sartre, Vonnegut, Robbe-Grillet also contribute to the proper placement and present viability of such symbols. Investigations into the nature of nar-



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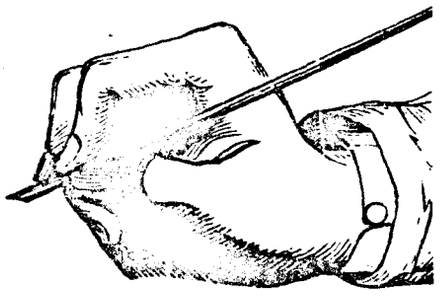
rative (particularly the novel and autobiography which historically have had close relationships with Christianity) by Stephen Crites, Dominic Crossan, David Burrell, William McClendon, H.R. Niebuhr, Stanley Hauerwas, Brian Wicker and Wesley Kort have helped to educate formerly simplistic notions of "the Christian story" through an appreciation of the complexity and variety of narrative forms, their relation to history on the one hand and to belief on the other.

But one contribution stands out in my mind as especially significant to theological reflection in our time. The contribution is so immense and its implications so vast that I can do no more than suggest parameters. I will begin, somewhat circumspectly, with some remarks on Zeffirelli's film *Jesus of Nazareth*, condemned at first by conservatives as dangerous in its departure from biblical texts and hailed by some liberals as a sensitive and sophisticated—though not entirely



successful—rendition of the life of Jesus.

The film raises the issues of "realism" and "reality" in unavoidable and to me, disturbing ways, and it is these issues which I believe are the contemporary hermeneutical theologians' battlefield. The medium of film is not necessarily "realistic" in a simplistic sense; the camera does not necessarily assume an omniscient, documentary point of view; film need not support a literalistic sensibility. One need only to think of what Bergman or Fellini might do given the assignment to film "the story of Jesus" to realize that this is so. Zeffirelli's film, however, in spite of ghostly voices at the annunciation and some reticence at the baptism (and with the scenes dealing with the appearances), is realistic in the sense that most people can identify with easily and comfortably. In that film Jesus is sufficiently "divine" so that the viewer feels that were he or she "there," belief in Jesus as the saviour would be the appropriate response and one that the viewer could and would have made. Now that is "realism" of a literal variety, albeit of a sophisticated sort perhaps, but still identifiable. What New Testament critics unceasingly remind us of is the "distance" between the life of Jesus and belief, a distance epitomized in the four perspectival accounts we have of that life. To handle not only the human and natural events of Jesus's life "realistically," but to deal with the "divine" elements in similar fashion is a great travesty of where the 20th century is on the question of realism and reality.

One need not be very deep into contemporary epistemology to accept historical relativity on most issues: people nowadays know that political institutions, social and family patterns, economic structures, and even ethical decisions are determined by historical and geographic placement. Yet when it comes to religious issues, a kind of blindness occurs, buttressed undoubtedly by weariness with uncertainties and change on all sides, which encourages a desire for the literal, the absolute, the "realistic."

Now realism in this sense—picture-book, simple realism—in dealing with religious matters is so false that it must, if Christianity is not only to survive but to be viable for our time, be

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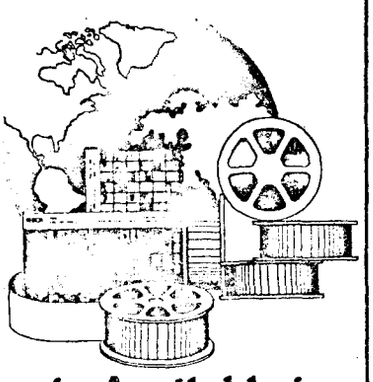

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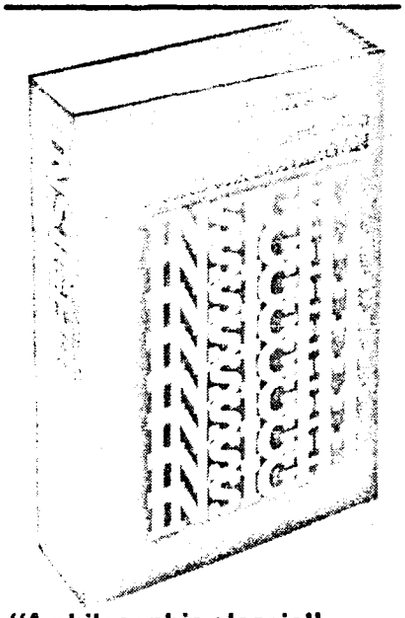

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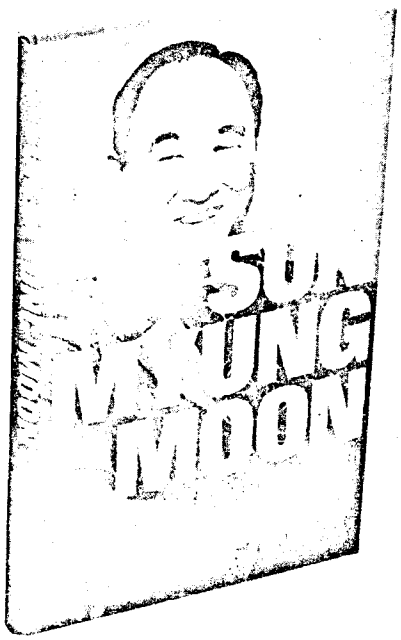

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countered. And one of the special contributions of hermeneutical theologians is to counter it. A parable, a prayer, a poem, a story have no relations with simple realism. For instance, the parable—the characteristic form in which Jesus taught—is not a literal statement, it is not a "realistic" story, it is not a lesson or a moral which fits comfortably into conventional lifestyles and expectations. It is, among other things, as Ricoeur insists, "a redescription of reality," which is to say it is certainly concerned with "reality," but that reality which it images disorients and upsets our ordinary, conventional views of reality. The parables of Jesus, as well as the sayings, healings, miracles and aphorisms, "work" on the dialectic of our view of reality versus another view of reality. "You have heard it said to you . . . but I say to you . . ." God's ways (on the issue of reality) do not appear to be our ways.

Symbolic language, what Philip Wheelwright calls tensive language versus steno language (or metaphoric versus conceptual language) *lives off* the distance between conventional views of reality and the new view encapsulated in the image. Now it is precisely that *distance* between conventional reality and a redescription of reality over which the hermeneutical theologian stands guard. She or he protects it, insists on it, remarks on its peculiarities, tries to run down its particularities, and finally, because "the symbol gives rise to thought," ventures interpretations on the meaning of the central symbols for our time. The interpretations are necessarily tentative and subject to change, for the distance of symbolic language from its referent is never overcome. Recall that Jesus never answered questions about what the kingdom of God *is* except with that distance in place—he told parables, which did not say what the kingdom is but what it is *like*. Surely, we can do no more. A film on "the life of Jesus" (that subject of all subjects!) should avoid "is"—simple realism—at all costs. A parable, a fable, a fantasy, a surrealistic

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drama might have retained the necessary distance which all religious matters demand and which that extraordinary (absurd?) life—the life of God manifest in a human life—demands most assuredly.

In sum then, one central task for the hermeneutical theologian is to heighten the genuinely disclosive and illuminative symbols of the Christian tradition, both old and new ones, in such a way that they will "happen" as events in people's lives, re-orienting their perceptions of reality and, as a consequence of new sight, redirecting their wills and actions. This is accomplished not by playing to conventional understandings of reality (which scarcely align with the reality of God), but by maintaining the distance between conventional reality and the redescription of reality in the Gospels. The hermeneutical theologian, the theologian formed by poetics, is our best guardian against literalism and idolatry as well as the preacher's helper to move people to hear and accept the redescription of reality ingredient in Christian symbols.

Finally, I wish to speak to a limitation—and I believe a severe limitation—of theology's encounter with literature in the work of most of its practitioners (including my own modest contributions). Note that the model in which most hermeneutical theologians work is implicitly in terms of *individuals* experiencing a re-orientation in their understanding of reality, from "our ways" to "God's ways." Current parabolic interpretation has supported the individualistic bias: individual characters are seen as the focus of the stories and the parables are viewed as addressed to listening individuals. In addition, current interest in parables has been accompanied by a fascination with Christian autobiography. The continuum between parable and autobiography is a legitimate one, but exclusive or even central focus on this line has meant an implicit continuation of a Bultmannian—and historically Protestant—concern with the faith and life-style of the individual to the neglect of the *people*, neglect of social and political transformations of a communal nature. The Gospel, say the liberation praxis theologians, was transmitted by the community, for the community. It is also noteworthy that the marching orders for liberation theologians, the parable of the Last Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46), is interpreted by these theologians as demanding not charity to naked and hungry individuals, but as a call for social and political revolution.

No indictment could be sharper or more appropriately lodged. The Achilles heel of "theology's encounter with literature" is precisely at the point of its focus on the individual. And there is no ready and defensible answer. Art, except in primitive and folk cultures, has, in the western tradition, been not only individualistic, but

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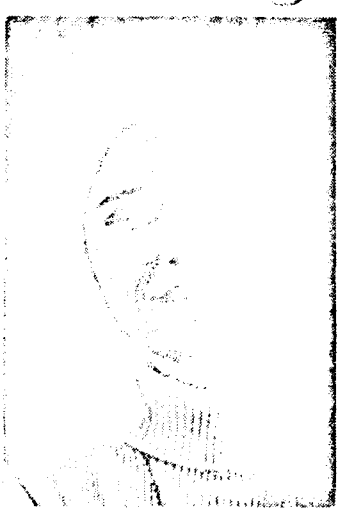
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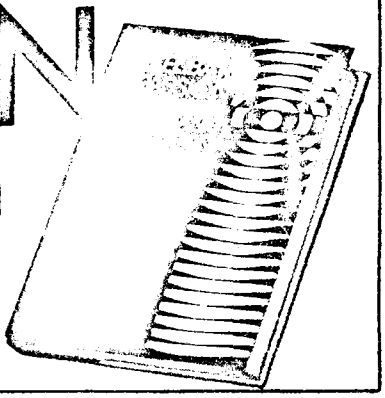

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elitist. The art of the masses in technological societies appears to be either ideologically controlled (as in communist and fascist countries) or commercially prostituted (as in capitalist countries, aided by television). Moreover, the model of truth implied by the hermeneutical theologies is one of "disclosure" and "illumination"—the truth is *perceived*. While this does not mean mere intellectual assent, since it can and should include the emotions and will, nonetheless, it does not square with the transformationist model of truth for a more humane society of the praxis theologians. For the hermeneutical theologian, Christian truth is something a person *believes;* for the praxis theologian it is something a community of people *does*. In the one case a human life comes alive to the reality of God; in the other, a society is transformed by that reality.

No defense of hermeneutical theology would be appropriate—and probably not credible—at this point. Those concerned with the disclosive powers of the central Christian symbols have not, for the most part, been centrally concerned with the redescription of reality ingredient in these symbols as they impinge on systematic oppression by class, race, and sex in our society. However, while I present no defense of present practices, some changes might be suggested.

First, there ought to be an insistence on the social nature of Christianity. The beginning of Christianity was the church, not a wandering Jew's relations with individuals for their personal salvation. The church told the story of Jesus, interpreted and transmitted that story. All who hear it today do so only by means of the community which preceded us and of which each of us is a part. Moreover, the central symbols of the tradition, whether these be the exodus, the kingdom of God, the people of God, the body of Christ, the eucharistic meal, are communal and social with vast possibilities, as the praxis theologians have discovered, for interpretations which bring to the forefront notions of liberation, transformation, equality, interdependence, mutuality and community. The social (as well as political and egalitarian) dimensions of Christianity are a largely unplowed field for hermeneutical theologians.

Secondly, one way to increase social interpretation of the symbolic resources of Christianity would be for hermeneutical theologians to focus on some rather than other genres within the Christian tradition. Autobiography and the traditional novel are basically individualistic forms, but some kinds of stories, including the parable, and certainly myth, drama, and corporate prayer are communal forms. The traditional western novel, tracing the highly individualistic search for self-identity of the hero, is undergoing such changes, at least in avant garde circles, that it may eventually join hands with liberation theology in sup-

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port of corporate experience. As the most flexible of all forms, narrative art remains an open question as to its potential for communal expression. It is not accidental that Black, feminist, and third world theologies speak of "the story of the people," signifying by that phrase both the historical oppression this people has endured as well as the mythic stories that have sustained the pilgrimage of the community. At any rate, some forms of narrative art as well as corporate prayer, myth and drama are intrinsically social genres and therefore may be the most fruitful resources for hermeneutical theologians to work with for disclosing the socially transformatist power of the Gospel.

Thirdly, praxis theologians insist with persuasive power that theologies betray their "social contexts"; that is, academic theologians, doing their work in universities, share an ideology —a whole set of assumptions about methodology and criteria for truth— which differs radically from the ideology of theologians whose social context is Latin American villages. In the latter case, reflection on the experience of the oppressed in the light of divine action determines the method and the criteria of truth. The issue of the social context of theology, the assumed expectations of the communities in which theologians work and to whom they address their work, is one of increasing importance. It is also a painful issue since theologians have somewhat willingly exchanged their historical seats in the churches for academic chairs in the universities— the latter are not only better cushioned but, in our society, more prestigious. Most of us do not like to hear the liberation theologians' indictments of academic theology (which for the most part includes seminary theology as well) as individualistic, unengaged, and distant from communities experiencing oppression. The alternative is not that all theologians should live in the barrios (most third world, Black, and feminist theologians do not—in fact, most are in universities!). However, the issue of *identification*, to whom one belongs and to whom one speaks, is critical. Are the criteria of the academy the only or central ones for hermeneutical theologians? Can theologians identify in significant ways with oppressed communities? Imagination as well as some degree of sacrifice (perhaps changes in teaching and writing interests to benefit needs within oppressed communities) are minimal suggestions.

All of what I have suggested in this brief essay comes under the heading of Tracy's call for a "responsible pluralism" in theology. A chastened sense of one's own limitations and an

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openness both to others' contributions as well as changes in personal agendas are part of this call. Hermeneutical theologians, like other theologians, have a critical part to play in "responsible pluralism" in theology. "Literature and religion" is not a marginal enterprise, nice for those with interdisciplinary interest, but finally unimportant in the grand scheme of theology. Theology's encounter with literature was in the beginning and it will be there in the end.

NOTES

1. Amos N. Wilder, "Imagination in Relation to the Bible and Contemporary Theology," Lecture delivered at the AAR Regional Meeting at Trinity College, Hartford, Conn., Spring 1977; quoted in *Seedbed* (Newsletter of Society for Arts, Religion, and Contemporary Culture, Inc.), 5 (June 1977), p. 6.
2. I can mention only a few of the most critical contributors to this conversation between theology and literature, a conversation that includes philosophers, New Testament scholars, theologians, scientists, and literary critics: Philip Wheelwright, *The Burning Fountain: A Study in the Language of Symbolism* and *Metaphor and Reality*; Max Black, *Models and Metaphors*; Ian Ramsay, *Religious Language*; Ian Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms: A Comparative Study of Science and Religion*; Robert W. Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic and Word of God*; Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*; Dan O. Via, *The Parables. Their Literary and Existential Dimension*; Paul Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," *Semeia IV* (1975) and articles in *Philosophy Today*, 17 (1973) as well as *The Symbolism of Evil*; John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables* and *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story*; William A. Beardslee, *Literary Criticism of the New Testament*; Erich Auerbach *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*; Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative*; Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," JAAR, 39 (1971); Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography*; Brian Wicker, *The Story-Shaped World: Fiction and Metaphysics*; James B. Wiggins, ed., *Religion as Story*; Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction.*
3. Persons working in thematic criticism of religious motifs in contemporary literature are too numerous to cite, but a few names stand out. The publications of Nathan A. Scott, Jr., continue to be critical and his latest ones, *Three American Moralists: Mailer, Bellow and Trilling* and *The Poetry of Civic Virtue Eliot, Malraux and Auden* are especially interesting. Other outstanding practitioners include J.R. Barth, Roy Battenhouse, S.L. Bethell, Cleanth Brooks, Vincent Buckley, Carol Christ, Robert Detweiler, F.W. Dillistone, Christine Downing, Tom Driver, Maurice Friedman, Helen Gardiner, Giles Gunn, Julian Hartt, David Hesla, Stanley Hopper, Martin Jarrett-Kerr, John Killinger, Wesley Kort, R.W.B. Lewis, William F. Lynch, William Mueller, David Noel, George Panichas, William Spanos, Amos Wilder, Anthony Yu, Theodore Ziolkowski.
4. *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: Seabury Press), 1975; "Modes of Theological Argument," *Theology Today* 33 (January 1977); "What Are The Directions In Which Theology Must Move Now?", working paper presented to the American Theological Society Spring, 1977.
5. Ibid., *Theology Today*, pp. 392, 391.
6. "What Are The Directions . . .," p. 14

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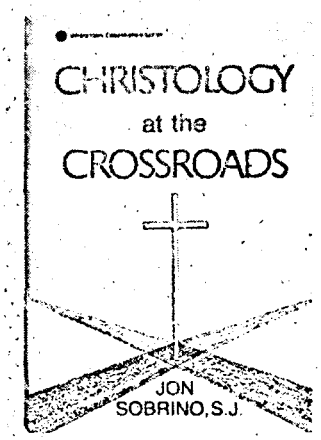

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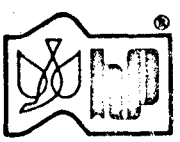

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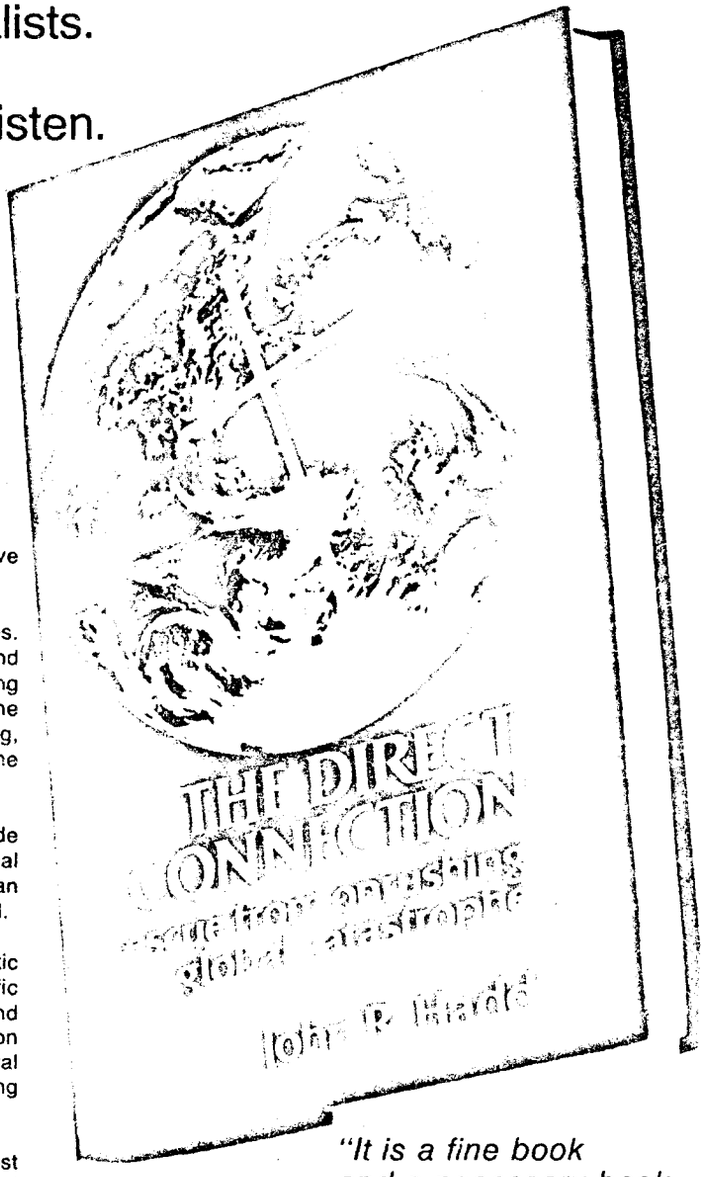

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